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ROBERT CHETWYND'S
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° ROBERT CHETWYND'S
CONFESSION.

A Novel.

BY
ELIZABETH A. MURRAY,
AUTHOR OF 'ELLA NORMAN,' 'JOHN ALLSTON'S VOW,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:
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~~Vol. I~~

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PREFACE.

SINCE the following tale has been written, some romantic incidents have occurred in the history of a family of distinction which have attracted much public attention, and which so curiously resemble similar scenes in this story, that the Author thinks it as well to anticipate the very natural conclusions of readers and critics, and to assure those who may honour her with their notice, that the coincidences, however curious, are still only coincidences.. The novel actually anticipated the events in real life, and had been for months in the Publishers' hands before these incidents occurred.

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ROBERT CHETWYND'S CONFESSION.

CHAPTER I.

ETHEL'S TROUBLES.

"OH, Nellie! you don't know how hateful and detestable you are! You don't know how cruel and selfish and disobliging I think you are to-day? 'Example is better than precept,' so at least you tell me, and yet think what a dreadful one you are setting me! Considering your own pleasure and comfort instead of your neighbours'!"

The girl who uttered what she considered this bitter reproach, I need not say was very young, neither quite a child, nor yet nearly a woman; and the delinquent thus addressed was a tall, pale, faded woman of about thirty-five, with an

unmistakable air of high-breeding, though her dress was plain almost to shabbiness, and her cottage, in the tiny drawing-room of which they were sitting, bore like evidence of a very slender purse. She smiled faintly but pleasantly at her young companion, but said nothing. The girl, after waiting in vain for a reply, began again,

"I'll tell Grannie too! What will she think of you? You whom she is always holding up as a paragon of perfection and an example to me!"

"If I am 'hateful' and 'detestable' and 'disobliging,' you should both be very grateful that I do not inflict myself on you,—I should, I am sure, if I were in your place."

"Oh, you *know* what I mean, only you pretend not! You *know* why I call you nasty and disagreeable and unkind—only because you won't come, and you *know* how I want you! You tell me always to give up my own wishes to oblige others; here is a fine opportunity for you to give what you call a practical illustration of your rule!" Then in a pleading tender voice, "Nellie, *do* come!"

But "Nellie" only smiled and shook her head, while the girl who was thus urging her to comply with her wishes sat swinging her hat by its

elastic band, now and then striking it against her boots, as a sort of safety valve to her superfluous vexation, as she extended her tall and somewhat angular person into an inclined plane from her waist to her heels. She was seated in, or rather extended upon, a lounging-chair, her head bent forward but inclining slightly to one side, and her features and person forced into an exaggerated expression of ill-humour, the better to convey her deep sense of "Nellie's" perversity. After a pause she resumed,

"It's fine to preach, Nellie, and you can talk like a book, but now when I want you to put your principles into practice, it's quite another thing. You who are set over me to teach me, actually corrupting my mind! That is to say indirectly."

"Very plausibly put, Ethel, but there are very few things in this world which do always present their true bearings on the outside, and in this case, what seems so very clear to you is the reverse of the fact as it is, and no one knows this better than you do. You know I must have some better reason than mere caprice when I prefer remaining at home instead of dining with you and meeting your uncle and his family; ask your own heart, Ethel."

"That is just the surface I see, or rather saw, but I *know* there must be some hidden reason—indeed you don't deny it, and you know I always like to *know* the *why* of everything. You say it shows an inquiring mind, which is a good trait in my character, Nellie; now I want to *know* the reason *why* for this piece of ill-nature? There are 'knows' enough for you!"

Before Ellen could reply, Ethel had got up from her former inelegant position, and seated herself on the arm of her friend's chair.

"Nellie! dearest, but most intensely provoking Nellie, *do* tell me why! You will take hours of sleep away from me, for I shall lie awake and wonder all night what it can possibly be which can change your whole nature, and make you actually *horrid*. I shall look hollow-eyed and ill to-morrow, even worse than I do to-day, and yet Grannie says I must look my best,—and it will be all your doing."

"What a catalogue of consequences all growing out of my refusing to dine with you on one day! and, I may add, what a shower of strong adjectives you have hurled at my devoted head! But expletives fall harmless at my feet, I am proof against such arguments."

"Nellie, you are practising evasion, and that too is wrong, and setting me another bad example. Think of the moral injury you are inflicting on me."

"Another reason, I think, why you are better without me."

"Oh, Nellie, you do try my patience so terribly!" She stole her arms round her friend's neck, and the scowl gave way to her usual expression, which was sweet and winning; she looked into her friend's eyes and tried to read her motives.

"Dear old disagreeable creature! Why persist in being so *horrid*, just when it is of so much importance to me for you to be nice and good and pleasant? Do-o, Nellie, let me coax you to come, or at least to tell me WHY,—only three letters, you know, W. H. Y."

Why! only three little letters, as Ethel truly said, but nevertheless sometimes the most awkward combination which the English language affords. How often, in the secret recesses of our hearts, do we dodge and evade it, as it seems to embody itself in a fiendish or impish form, pry impertinently into our hidden lumber-rooms and closets and garrets, and from these recesses to

which we have consigned them, ruthlessly turn out our skeletons, our daggers, our poisons, our wounds, and mercilessly flourishing them before our eyes, challenge our acknowledgment of their existence, instead of leaving them where we had put them,—“behind us,” like Mr. Podsnap, in the vain hope that we should be able to ignore their existence! An ill-bred, impertinent, irrepressible little monosyllable, which at this very moment was working its mission in Nellie’s memory, performing its unwelcome office, and whispering almost audibly an echo of Ethel’s question,—Why shrink from meeting Robert Chetwynd, his wife and daughter, in his mother’s home?

The eloquent blood which suffused the usually pale face of Mrs. Mildmay would have been sufficient reply to one versed in reading this index to human character. It would have told of reasons, conflicting and chaotic, which as yet had not even formed themselves sufficiently into shape to furnish Nellie herself with a distinct outline, but which were still not to be set aside. The fruit of the tree of knowledge is sometimes very bitter, and, once tasted, cannot soon be forgotten. Ellen might perhaps have been suffering from the effect of this questionable indulgence;

although she was a cultivated, even a high-bred woman, she had no confidence in her own power of assuming that calm, polished exterior which so effectually conceals the storms which sometimes rage beneath it. Years of retirement had added to her natural shyness, and although the girl was unconscious of the fact, Ellen knew that a family crisis was imminent,—a crisis in which much might devolve on her and for which she was quite unprepared. Conscience, or rather conscious knowledge, sent the eloquent blood to Ellen's faded cheek, and fear sent it throbbing back to her heart. Could she raise the tiniest corner of the curtain which concealed a dark vista which she knew lay across the girl's future path, the shadow of which even now loomed across it? No, she could not; yet still, she could not bring herself suddenly to confront a cousin whom she had not met for years, but of whose past history she knew more than she dared to speak of, and from whom she shrank with a bitter antipathy which it was also necessary for her to conceal. She must have time to summon courage for the meeting, or she would betray herself.

She sat with Ethel's hand in hers, caressing it

as if to compensate for, or at least soften the refusal of her request. Meanwhile a bright thought seemed to strike Ethel; she began to entertain suspicions that there was a deficiency in millinery somewhere, and that this was the cause of Ellen's reluctance,—this she could obviate. She twined her long arms round her friend's neck.

"Is it a headdress, or gloves, or *lingerie*? I can rig you out from Grannie's wardrobe. Only say you will come!"

"Ethel, I should require no other incentive than my wish to please you if I could; but I *cannot*, though it is from no deficiencies in my toilette. I cannot go, and if you have any faith in me, you should be satisfied that I have a good reason, though not one of sufficient importance to deprive you of your 'beauty-sleep' or of one hour of natural rest." And Ellen drew the girl towards her and kissed her cheek; but Ethel would not be coaxed, she drew herself away coldly and resumed her seat.

"No, Nellie, I have no faith in you to-day; I feel as if it would be nice to be able to hate you, if I could get into the way of doing it—only, I don't know how!"

"That at least is one of the evils of life from which I hope I am safe," said Nellie, smiling, though her smile was but a transparent veil over the shade of perplexity which her countenance still betrayed. Ethel said nothing more for some moments. She sat with her chin resting in her hand, and stared before her at nothing in particular which was visible to mortal eye, but into her own dark vista of girlish trouble, painfully evident to her mental vision, but very different to the realities Ellen foresaw.

She was a tall, weedy-reedy-looking girl, apparently about fourteen years of age,—one who had suddenly grown out of all recognized proportions;—all bones and angles at present, yet with a figure which might develope into something far more round and elegant. She had a pale, almost greyish complexion, as if her skin was too transparent to conceal the veins and darker tissues beneath it, and without warm colour of any sort to redeem the leaden shade which predominated; even her lips were of a cold hue. Her eyes were a dark violet-grey, with greyish circles round them, making them seem much larger than they really were; her brows were clear, delicately pencilled, and well-defined, with

the arch beneath them a little too hollow perhaps for one so young, but which defect gave additional power to her expression; her lashes were long and well curved, adding depth of tone to her eyes, which were her one decidedly good feature now; for although her others were neither irregular nor unpleasing, and her face had a well-defined contour from ear to chin, terminating in a dimple, there was too much of thinness and pallor about her whole person to suggest the impression of beauty. But there was something in those eyes which indicated latent depths of character, unknown perhaps even to the girl herself, until called forth by circumstances.

In this, my first introduction of my heroine to gentle readers, I am aware I am not placing her in a most attractive light; she is only an unformed, overgrown young creature, without the conventional training usually bestowed on a girl of her position and age,—a “tall, lanky thing” among her contemporaries of less inches, a “hobbledehoy” in the eyes of the matrons round, and without those attractions which men often look for and find in many sweet budding beauties of her age. She was still an earnest, thoughtful, warm-hearted child, full of every good impulse, and

carefully shielded from every sinister influence. The day may come, if I have the good fortune to secure your sympathy, when we shall see her blossom into something more attractive,—what is better, see her tried and proved sterling metal. But all this time she has been uncomfortably seated on the arm of Nellie's chair, trying to look as disagreeable as possible.

"I never could bear in my life to relinquish a project without a good reason for it. It is one of the things you have taught me, and now you want to teach me just the contrary."

"Ethel, your life is only now beginning. You will have to relinquish the dearest hopes of that life, perhaps, and learn to bear it, and never know *why*. You will have to bear many harder things than this childish disappointment, and never know *why*. Let this first trial be a lesson to you."

"And do you never mean to come to us while they are here?"

"Here is a fresh exercise for you in restraining your curiosity!"

"Oh, bother exercises! I do them for you in French and German, that is enough. I won't stay here any longer, unless you make yourself

agreeable;" and Ethel pulled the net which confined her hair into something like its proper place, and stuck her hat well down over her eyes into what she hoped was a defiant expression, glancing furtively at a small mirror over the chimney-piece, to see the effect. "Good-bye. I'll tell Grannie you are in a nasty temper, and say you won't come."

"That will not be true. Tell her she knows I would go if I could."

"And that will not be true, either; for you know you could come if you wished it, so don't teach me to tell fibs."

"I could, certainly, in one sense, not in another. You can do many things in one sense which virtually you cannot do in another, from restraining influences as strong, if not stronger than physical impediments."

"Oh, now you are getting into physic, I'll be off! I am sick enough already without it."

"I said *physics*, or alluded to them, you perverse girl!"

"Well, that is the plural, and the singular is too much for me—'singularly disagreeable.' I know how fond you are of puns, Nellie, and shall cultivate them as an accomplishment when I am

grown up, 'just to please you;'"—and Ethel tried to laugh, while the tears which she had been vainly trying to suppress by affectations of one sort or another welled up to her eyes at the same moment.

"Oh, Nellie! if Gilbert even were only here, he would not desert me as you do! I am just like you,—*I can't* do it, just for the same reason you can't. I'll stay here; my reason is as good as yours; and without the medicine—an invincible repugnance to meet my uncle. You hate it, and I hate it; and I have as good a right to say 'can't' as you (although you said '*cannot*,' I believe)."

Then she sat down again, and dexterously tried to get rid of the tears which would overflow in spite of her efforts to let off the steam through more heroic channels.

"Ethel, you are not serious, I know; but for the sake of argument compare our positions. You are the only daughter of the house, your dear old grandmother's only relative living with her; the house is your home now, probably will be your inheritance hereafter. In consideration of dear Lady Agnes's infirmity—her blindness—you are called on to do more than is usually ex-

pected from a girl of your age. You must, in a measure, represent her, and do the honours to your uncle and aunt and little cousin. I, on the contrary, have my little home here, and am your guest when I go to you. There is nothing particularly out of the way in my wanting to remain at home just this once."

"Oh, but you don't know how horrid it will be to meet them without you, and Grannie blind. I don't like Uncle Robert's letters, and I know I shall hate him. Oh, Nellie, you are very cruel!"

"And you are not kind," said Ellen, her eyes too filling with tears; "come down to-morrow, and tell me all about it. There will be no lessons, of course. I am sure, when once in for it, you will do the honours of the Priory as Miss Chetwynd should do them."

"There it is! Oh, Nellie, is it wrong to tell you just so much of what Uncle Robert writes in his letters to grandmamma? Only think! he calls me 'that girl,' and his own little daughter Dora, who is quite a child, 'Miss Chetwynd,'—and Dora is at least three years younger than I am, and he was younger than my papa! Oh, Nellie, I know I shall detest them all!"

"Never mind what he calls you; his letters

are to his mother, and you should try and not think of what he writes to her. Perhaps he forgets that, in consequence of his mother's blindness, you are her young secretary."

"But she is not 'Miss Chetwynd,' and I'll not call her 'Miss Chetwynd.' I shall be most particular in speaking of her to the servants as 'Miss Dora,' and I'll only call her plain 'Dora' myself."

"Ethel, how old are you?"

"I shall be fifteen next birthday—three years older than she is—and you know it, Nellie, as well as I do, only you are so contrary to-day."

"Nearly a woman, Ethel, yet talking like a baby! You must try and do more credit to my teaching."

There was no use in pouting and contradicting, and, as she called it, being "contrary." Ethel's full heart could contain itself no longer; she threw herself into Ellen's arms, and sobbed as if that troublesome member would break; and the elder woman, either from sympathy or from some hidden reason of her own, sobbed too. So for a while they indulged in this truly feminine solace without speaking. At length Ellen said:—

"You have made as great a goose of me as of

yourself, Ethel, and without the same excuse. I must send you home, or you will be late."

Then Ethel once more adjusted her hat (less fiercely this time), shook out her dress, and departed,—dejection and disappointment betraying themselves in every movement as she slowly walked to the gate and disappeared from view.

Ellen Mildmay, oppressed by a sense of responsibility, stood at the window, and watched the retreating figure. "My poor darling child! so you, too, had your little *arrière pensée*, your little 'why,' which you are too guileless to conceal. If you start at 'Miss Chetwynd' now, what will it be when you know all?" She turned from the window, and resumed her work; but while her fingers flew over some piece of female attire, her heart was raised in prayerful incoherent pleadings for guidance for herself in whatever she might be called on to do or say,—pleadings that that young child might be shielded and protected from insidious unseen foes, strengthened to bear whatever might befall her, and that all might be well in the end. What that end might be, Ellen could not foresee.

CHAPTER II.

WOOLERTON PRIORY AND ITS INHABITANTS.

Few counties in England can vie with Woodlandshire in the richness of its sylvan scenery, and those attributes of rural life which are emphatically "English;" and Woolerton, the little village on the confines of which stood Mrs. Mildmay's cottage, was in its way a gem—one of those gems which haunt the memories of distant wanderers with sweet pictures, reminiscences of the past,—of childhood's homes,—pictures which, whether in the jungles of India, the scorched and arid plains of Australia, or the giant forests of America, among newly-acquired riches, or in the despair and disappointment of blighted hopes of winning them, alike cause

Britons to reiterate the line of the old song again and again, "There's no place like home!"

It was a straggling village, and, for that reason, more picturesque; for the most part on the mail-coach road, which suddenly swept into the midst of it from between a wooded hill on one side and the Monkwater river on the other, which formed a miniature pass just there, said to have been the scene of more than one skirmish in the old times of the Civil Wars; but none of the present inhabitants cared particularly about the legends of their village, much as they loved it as it stood in its wealth of wood, water, and hillside. There was an inn, at which, in coaching-days, the mails changed horses, and where, from its garden at the back, which sloped down to the stream, considerable trout-fishing was attempted by numerous anglers of various degrees of proficiency. It was called the 'Mitre,' and displayed a nondescript headgear as a sign, supposed to have been adopted in compliment to the religious fraternity which a few centuries ago inhabited the Priory, until that grand despoiler of the Church, and defender of the faith, Henry VIII., transferred their estate to an ancestor of the Chetwynd family, the present pos-

sessors of its noble woods and goodly dwelling, to say nothing of the village and farms around, with one or two humble abodes of gentility-with-small-means included.

As the road entered the village, the river, on the brink of which it had run before, swept backwards towards the Priory grounds, which rose pile upon pile of wooded hillocks and verdant glades on the opposite bank, thus giving room between the road and the stream for the village ; and, buried under fruit-trees, and almost hidden behind thick hedges, cottage after cottage peeped forth. Then came a shop or two, and the village schools ; then an orchard, and then the ' Mitre,' with its tea-gardens and summer-houses, showing above its well-clipped hedge. On the right, skirted by a grove of magnificent elms, stood the church and the resting-place of departed parishioners, down to the very enclosure of which the plantations approached, and then, as it were, scrambled up the sweep of hill, which seemed to retreat gracefully and deferentially, as if curtsying to make room for the ecclesiastical buildings, and the habitations of the dead and the living connected with them, which exclusively occupied the few acres of space thus yielded.

Beyond the church, on a swelling knoll, which seemed a spur of the more elevated ground behind, stood the Vicarage, the upper windows of which commanded the village wherever the trees did not intervene. The churchyard, towards which the lawn and flower-garden sloped, and from which it was only separated by a wall concealed by a hedge, was fully open to the inspecting eye of the Vicar and his family, while the resting-place of their predecessors mutely admonished them of the end to which all alike were hastening. On the other side of the road, in an oblique direction, the 'Mitre,' and its routine of daily traffic, its occasional inebriates, and the constant stir after working hours of its more respectable frequenters, afforded a startling contrast. Directly opposite the Vicarage—at its very feet, in fact, though on the other side of the road, and adjoining the garden of the 'Mitre'—stood the residence of the village surgeon, an M.D.

Hard, stern, and uncompromising stood this abode of health, a rigid cube without a branch near to intercept the fresh air, or "harbour damp;" a few flowers and a closely-cut hedge surrounded the front and half the sides, until

another high close-cropped hedge of evergreens shut out that mysterious approach to the back regions by which patients of the humbler class, and servants of the higher orders, communicated to the assistant their more or less urgent wants. But although the said high hedge defrauded the Vicarage of a portion of its rights of direct inspection, as this side-entrance was approached by a lane leading down to the river, and affording access to the Doctor's stables in the first instance, and then egress to his meadow which was formed by a bend of the river at the back of the house, the Vicarage could still take accurate note of all who sought the Doctor's aid as they plunged round the corner and were lost to view. Passing on between the two rival houses, the physicians of the soul and the body, the road forked away in two directions. The one branch, being the turnpike-road, kept the even tenor of its way straight ahead, unless some hill or other obstacle intervened ; and along this, from the right side of the house, especially when winter denuded the trees of intercepting foliage, the Vicarage commanded an extensive view. The second fork was a country road under trees, curving round the irregular grassy triangle which formed the village

green. This was embellished at the further end by a horsepond under a clump of trees, and in the open space cricket, bowls, and other rural sports occasionally went on under the eye of the presiding Argus, the Vicaress, whose sense of duty obliged her to supply all her husband's shortcomings in this and other parish matters.

After passing the Green, the country road wound down towards the river, under trees still, but forming a vista commanded also by the Vicarage from an oriel window lately added to the drawing-room; and here a white cottage, with gables and chimneys partially covered by roses and creepers, was to be seen glistening through the trees. Into this cottage we have already unceremoniously intruded, when we overheard the argument between Ellen Mildmay and her young cousin, Ethel Chetwynd, the presumed heiress to all I have been attempting to describe.

Mrs. Mildmay was the widow of a naval officer, and was also a cousin of Lady Agnes Chetwynd, Ethel's grandmother, to whom the Priory and all the surrounding property belonged, under certain restrictions. It was her dower-house for life un-

conditionally, and so heavily encumbered by mortgage to herself, that unless the representative of the family, her only son, could clear off these liabilities, it became her absolute property to will away as she thought proper. It was the sudden advent of this son and his wife and daughter which had excited such dismay in the heart of his niece, and unconscious rival, Ethel, the only child of his elder brother Charles. This child had been adopted by his mother in her earliest infancy, and had remained with her ever since.

Lady Agnes was blind, and had been so for years now. Until her widowhood the Priory had not been inhabited by a Chetwynd for many years, certainly not for two generations, as it had been let on a long lease. It was not a place to satisfy the requirements of the late squire, who preferred his larger estate on the south coast, and until she came to take possession of it as her dower-house, she had only been heard of as the daughter of Lord Avon, and the wife of the lord of the manor. She came in deep black, mourning the recent death of her husband, and several of her children. Ethel was known as the daughter of one of her lost sons, but beyond this fact no

one knew, or indeed cared to inquire for, more. There was a vague idea of dissipation and general "wildness" connected with the dead sons, even of some terrible scandal about one of them, but no one troubled themselves to investigate the stories which had evidently bowed down her stately head. She had received the respectful civilities of her neighbours, and if good was to be done, she was ever ready to do it; but her bereavements and failing sight were accepted as sufficient reasons for her retired and almost secluded life. When her impending affliction was confirmed, in the shape of total blindness, it seemed to take so prominent a place in the minds and sympathies of her neighbours, that the old hints of family misfortunes and vague rumours of sons going wrong were yet more completely thrown in the background. Honoured and revered in her own person, Ethel took that share of the consideration which all felt disposed to accord to her belongings,—although, in consequence of the infirmity of the old lady, the child had grown up in more than common seclusion from children of her own age. She was known as the daughter of one of the dead sons, and although Lady Agnes had been living for more than ten years at Woolerton

Priory, neither of her living children had visited her. It was an accepted fact that her only surviving son owned Chetwynd Park, and lived abroad, and it was also known in a general way that she had a daughter in India whose husband held a high position in Bengal. Of her Lady Agnes often spoke, induced, perhaps, by the fact that her husband's nephew was a very frequent visitor; and this circumstance caused Mrs. Pelham and her movements and existence in India to be more distinctly recognized in Woodlandshire circles, while Robert Chetwynd was a myth, unassociated with any interest with which they were acquainted,—the intangible legend of "something wrong with some of her sons," inducing a reserve in those who otherwise might have ascertained all about them by indirect questions or observations.

Suddenly, a short time before this tale begins, Lady Agnes had been startled by the announcement of her son's intended return to England with his family; and now again, as suddenly, he had announced his intention of paying her a long visit, if she could take them in; and he left her no time for refusal, as the evening of the day upon which Ethel had vainly tried to induce Mrs.

Mildmay to meet them, he had appointed for his arrival at the Priory.

Ethel was dismayed, more by negative than positive influences; she had conceived an aversion for this uncle, her grandmother's reticence being the strongest among the many imperceptible causes of her antipathy. She never spoke unkindly or reproachfully of this son, it is true; he was a thing of course to her—an appendage,—but Ethel had never heard for him the warm expressions of love and affection which her own father's name always called forth; something, too, in the tone of voice and expression of countenance had its effect on the girl. Certain it was that Robert Chetwynd was a dormant terror to Ethel, which his suddenly expected arrival electrified into activity; hence her piteous appeals to “Nellie,” who seemed actuated also by some adverse feeling towards Robert, which Ethel would have given something to discover or understand.

“If Nellie had liked him, she would have been glad to see him again, but I never heard her say a word in his favour,—nor against him either,” she candidly admitted to herself. Still, there was evidently something about her uncle that

even made his own mother not seem to love him very much, and this was the man who was coming to them, and who would do—she did not know what else, but spoil her happiness she was sure, —and call her “that girl!”

CHAPTER III.

INTRODUCES MR. CALEB WILLIAMS.

ETHEL CHETWYND'S home, to which she was now wending her way, was a good substantial old English mansion. It nestled on the south side of a hill, up which ran in picturesque irregularity belts and clumps of forest trees, some of which approached near enough to throw their shadows on the venerable pile. Ivy covered many of the older gables, and peeped into the casements; against the more modern portions roses and clematis were trained. There were queer twisted chimneys in some places, in others modern contrivances for the more effectual escape of smoke; thick shrubberies almost surrounded the building, through which at in-

tervals were left spaces in which parterres of rare flowers flourished,—not in the tasteless ribbon gardening of to-day, but in the older and more artistic method to which the mistress was attached. Some people, at a loss for a fault, said “the place must be damp,” but the soil was light and sandy, the ground well drained, and, though sheltered by hills, the whole edifice stood on an elevation far above the river, which meandered round two sides of the grounds, and towards which they sloped in charming irregularity, intersected by shady walks, so contrived that the little domain seemed twice its real size as they wound round the bends of the river, and came back towards the house in what seemed a succession of surprises. There was a rustic bridge which spanned the stream at one point, the most favourable that could have been selected for picturesque effect, and by this, easy access was obtained to another plantation and belt of trees on the other side of the river, through which “The Cottage,” as it was called, peeped modestly, adding the relief of its white gables, walls, and chimneys to the sylvan scene. It was a very lovely little spot, a fitting adjunct to the more imposing building above, and even the widow-

hood of the younger lady and her position towards the elder one seemed to lend a sort of fitness and harmony to the whole.

Through this belt of trees Ethel sauntered slowly on her return home, as if her dilatory step could retard the hour she dreaded. She stood on the bridge and looked up the river, and then she turned and gazed down the stream, leaning on the railing, and resting her head on her hands.

So deep was her reverie that she never noticed the approach of a man who came out of the grounds, and took up his position beside her before she was aware of his presence.

"What does Miss Chetwynd see in the receding stream? anything fresh or suggestive?"

"Oh, Mr. Williams, how you startled me! I was thinking of nothing very particular, only I am in a bad humour. What have you been doing to-day?"

"The south-east view; and I flatter myself it is a success. The sun shone full on the south front, and left the east gables in deep shadow. Those horse-chestnuts are too autumnal to be quite true; the yellows will come out too dark; but only such critics as you and I will know that,

They are sharp and clear. I want one or two more views of this bridge. I have been thinking, as you leant over it, that I should like to take you just as you were standing, with the receding sun throwing a gleam on your profile. If I could catch the effect as I saw it then, I would give—well, more than I have if I had it.”

“Do you want to introduce me in a picture here too?”

“Yes, if you will allow me. Figures give life and finish to a scene; and you have been so very kind on former occasions.”

“Oh, I should like it very much indeed; I am very fond of seeing myself in a picture; only—only—I wish I had not grown quite so lanky. But ask Mrs. Mildmay to stand; she wears crinolines, and can look more stately.”

Mr. Williams, the photographer, looked down on his young companion and smiled. “Suppose I prefer a young girl in my foreground to a stately lady in a crinoline?”

“Oh, of course it is entirely a matter of taste. I shall be most happy to stand. Mrs. Mildmay will like to see me, though poor dear grand-mamma can’t.”

Ethel was going now towards home, but the

traces of recent tears attracted the eye of her companion, and, with rather presumptuous curiosity, he indirectly impeded her progress.

"I hope there is nothing the matter at home. Is Lady Agnes well?"

"Oh, thank you, she is quite well. Why do you ask?"

"Because you look anxious and worried. I feared that something was wrong."

Ethel blushed, and then a gleam of that beauty that was to come lighted up her face, usually so coldly grey. "Oh, I have other things to vex me sometimes;" and then recollecting that she ought not to betray to a stranger her dread of her uncle (whose greatest crime she could define even to herself was calling her "that girl"), she stopped short and looked very confused, blushing again violently.

The photographer scrutinized her with growing interest, and with an expression of affectionate concern which Mrs. Grymes, the Vicar's wife, would have deemed "highly improper and presumptuous in a person of his position;" but the eye of the Vicarage did not reach so far, and Ethel was too guileless to think of it, if she had not been too preoccupied to see it. Suddenly he

said, "When can you do me the honour of standing as you were good enough to promise? To-morrow at this time?"

"Yes. But, no! oh dear, not to-morrow! How provoking! They are coming this evening. What a dreadful bother!"

"I beg your pardon;—who did you say?"

"Only Uncle Robert and all of them." Then correcting herself, "You will think me very silly and childish, but my uncle, whom I have not seen for years, and his wife and daughter, whom I never saw, are coming this evening, and I have been living so quietly here with grandmamma that it makes me shy and foolish. My cousin Dora has had such advantages that they will think me an awkward country girl."

The swarthy visage of the man changed, although Ethel, who was staring in the river, did not observe it. He roused himself to say, however, "Of course you could not come the first day after their arrival."

"But some day very soon I shall. It will help me to amuse them; and then, perhaps, they will help me to form a group; so you will benefit by the delay."

"Look at that branch, Miss Chetwynd, as it

comes sweeping down the river; it has been torn from some fine tree,—there it goes, further and further away from the parent stem, to which it never can return.”

Ethel stared at him.

“ You stare at me; but it is suggestive of a great deal to me.”

“ Is it? Well, I am not clever in reading sermons from stones and trees and rivers, as you are, but I should like to sketch them as my papa did. He had a great talent; and grandmamma has his drawings, and sometimes she lets me look at them, though they are very precious to her. You know he died before I was born, and I am sure he was her favourite son. Only fancy being burnt at sea! Only a few escaped to tell of it; and I don't think she ever recovered the blow.”

Mr. Williams looked at her very earnestly, but said nothing. His manner was a strange mixture of the courteous deference of the artist to his patron, blended with an almost paternal interest in the child-woman by his side. Caleb Williams was a most unconventional personage, belonging to no particular order of society, nor at that time to any special trade or profession.

He was not an artist, in the proper acceptation of the word, as he confined himself to his camera, and did not sketch professionally. Uncouth in his outward man, whatever his antecedents might have been, his address was that of a gentleman, without the professional slang which is sometimes characteristic of the order. He seemed lost in a reverie after Ethel's last speech; then, as if suddenly awaking, he said abruptly, "Good evening," and walked rapidly away.

Ethel ascended the hill towards the house, her various grievances pressing heavily upon her young spirit, and with the nameless intangible something which so often forebodes a great crisis in our lives, weighing her down, and turning her heart to lead.

Mr. Williams quickly regained the bridge, and seating himself upon a bench formed in the old-fashioned woodwork of its railings, began to consider his own affairs. Apparently he was in doubt. His thoughts were somewhat thus,—
"I wonder the object of this move. I should like to see you, Master Robert, and take your photo too, if it were expedient, which it is *not* at present. There is good stuff in that girl; wonderful eyes when you look into them, quivering

at a shadow in the distance, yet brave enough for anything if brought to bay. I hate a pugnacious woman, but I detest a cowardly one. I think she is, or will be, equal to the occasion, or rather would be a year or two hence; but she is very young, too young yet. Mr. Williams! it is plain that photography will be at a discount in the present aspect of affairs. I should like to remain here *perdu*, and see what goes on. Caleb Williams! you have taken views enough of the Priory for the present; and the bridge, and the fine effects thereon of light and shadow, must remain unperpetuated by you for a time. You are *de trop* here for the future, old fellow."

He was not disposed to hurry his departure; he lingered on, thinking and thinking on into a future for himself and others,—a future where for himself he saw no hope save in the grave.

"God strengthen me and lead me into the right track, for I am sorely puzzled which to take!"

He raised his eyes to heaven as he said this,—his eye, I should have said, for one orb only was to be seen in the mutilated visage of the man, the other was carefully covered by a shade. Caleb was tall, with wide shoulders, and the

gait and air of a gentleman; though his clothes were threadbare and seedy, and his wide-awake much the worse for wear, yet his linen was snowy, and his hands and feet well kept. His hair was jet black, looking rather grey at the roots, his whiskers as dark, and so was his beard, except where a reddish tinge showed the sun's influence. His complexion was exceedingly swarthy, though, strange to say, the contour of his face, and his clear, deep blue eye, were unmistakably Saxon, and did not harmonize with the tone of his general colouring. On his right cheek was a scar which extended from the corner of his eye until it lost itself in the whisker, and the left eye was entirely concealed by the shade, which covered a considerable portion of his forehead and even some of his cheek. Altogether he presented a weather-beaten, world-battered, stranded appearance; at the same time there was still an arch of the well-cut nose and nostril, and an expression in that one blue orb which suggested the existence of some manly beauty in days gone by. His hands, like his face, were olive, but slender and well-formed, and their every unconscious action told of gentle birth and breeding.

He stood and took a long and lingering farewell of the lovely spot around him, collected his paraphernalia from the bank where he left them to join Ethel, and turned towards the village, passing of necessity the Cottage, which was now just visible through the mist of an autumnal evening. It seemed in that indistinct light that he did not pass the house however, in fact, Mrs. Grymes averred that she saw him go in most distinctly, and that although she was obliged to remain at the window for some time, to see who Dorothy Bruce was gossiping with round the corner, yet she was quite sure, and if on her deathbed would swear it, that during that time he never came out again. If he went on business, it was no time to transact it; and if it were pleasure, then more shame for the widow Mildmay to be receiving men in the evening, who went trapesing about the country nobody knew where.

The Vicar, good man, mildly suggested that as Mrs. Mildmay had for a good portion of her life been able to manage her affairs creditably, probably she might be able to do so now, and take care of herself, and even ventured a harmless joke on the unattractive appearance of the poor

artist, but his amiable spouse did not view the matter in the same light, and I fear his comfort for the evening was not improved by his display of meek chivalry on behalf of the offending widow.

CHAPTER IV.

A FAMILY MEETING.

"HALF-PAST five, I declare, and I have only an hour and a half left! The train comes in at 6.45, and a quarter of an hour more will bring them here!"

Ethel ran up the hill now to make up for lost time, cutting across the already damp grass wherever a curve of the walk made it advisable. To rush into her grandmother's room was her first step,—almost panting with her recent race.

"Dearest Gran, she won't come! I have coaxed and scolded and threatened, and even cried when I could not keep my patience any longer, and yet I could not move her. She is in such a queer humour; says you will have faith in

her, and will know she would come if she could ! I do so wish I knew why ; I cannot even guess. Can you, dearest ? ”

“ I have learned, my darling, that grown-up people know their own business best. When Nellie refuses to come to me, she must have a sufficient reason—a dozen, for what we know ; and it is not polite to pry into one’s motives always. Go and dress, love.”

“ What am I to wear ? Oh dear ! I forgot all about that ! ”

“ Mrs. Howard has seen to that. Your beautiful Indian muslin Aunt Blanche sent you is ready.”

“ Thanks, dearest Gran. Oh, Gran ! now that you will have your own very son with you, you will not care so much for me ; and, Gran, I shall never have you quite to myself now, I shall only have a share of you. And, dearest, don’t let Dora come between us, even if she is nicer than I am.”

“ My darling, my heart is large enough for all my children ; and you, my *‘very own child,’* hold a corner no one can reach, especially a man ; and Ethel, this is jealousy, one of the bad passions you must never encourage ; but go and dress,

I have to embellish my own old frame, so as to do honour to my son. He will see a difference in his old mother."

A fervent kiss, and an embrace which was more hearty than tender, and Ethel ascended to her own room, to find a toilette arranged for her on her bed, which, although it showed the loving care of the old woman whose taste contrived it, was certainly not calculated to set her off to the best advantage. It consisted of a dress of India muslin, perfectly limp, and a silk petticoat of narrow dimensions; starch and crinoline were enormities not encouraged by the ancient tire-woman, whose taste was formed when her lady's beauty was in its zenith, and who discoursed by the hour on the costumes she had superintended when "my lady was the queen of every company she entered." One of the younger maids generally performed such light offices as Ethel's independent habits made necessary, but this evening Howard determined to dress her lady, and then give the finishing touch to Miss Ethel. The young girl arranged her rich heavy dark hair at once, longing to be able to dress it after the fashion she most admired among the grown-up girls of her acquaintance; but such an act of

insubordination had never yet been perpetrated, and so it was too late to try it now. One or two furtive efforts were made at the glass; then her courage gave way, and it was pronounced a failure; so the long tresses were soon braided into plaits, which she wound into a mass at the back, after the miss-in-her-teens mode of the day, and finished off all with a blue-bow left for the purpose.

By this time Howard was relieved from her lady, and proceeded to adorn "the child" to her own satisfaction. Ethel was at that most awkward age for a girl, and the one at which she looks to the least advantage, especially when, as in her case, she promises to be tall. Supposed to be still a child, when she had quite outgrown every thing childish that could become her, she was yet too young to attempt a more womanly style without incurring the suspicion of aiming at premature womanhood,—terrible to both the old lady and her maid. Her tall, undeveloped figure required all that dress could achieve in filling her out, and covering her angles; yet a limp white muslin, with few petticoats, and a corsage, which left her thin shoulders and sharp elbows to stand out in high relief, was her costume for the even-

ing, with a blue sash, all the positive colour about her, except her eyes, and they even were grey and dark, though luminous. Jewellery was inadmissible ; so her pretty things were put away until she was considered old enough to wear them.

Thus arrayed, she descended to the drawing-room, which was lighted-up for the occasion, and adjoined Lady Agnes's sitting-room, which was the continuation of a suite on the lower floor dedicated to her use. Here Lady Agnes was already seated, dressed in stiff regal silk, her fine head and bust shaded by draperies of rich black lace. She presented the remains of a very splendid woman, one who had attracted and recoiled from the admiration of "the first gentleman in Europe." Still tall, full, and erect in person, her head retained much of its old poise, which, when good, in itself gives such character and expression to the presence, irrespective of feature. Her face retained many of the characteristics which made her resemblance to her dead son, Ethel's father, so remarkable to all who remembered him. Her eyes alone, from their vacant but placid stare, though apparently sound and bright, told a tale of infirmity ; for a second glance betrayed that she was quite blind.

Ethel kissed her on both cheeks as she entered.

"I hope you look your best, my darling?" And the old lady passed her hands over the girl's head and neck, to feel what she could not see. "India muslin? That's right. Blue sash? Well, you ought to look well, though your arms feel as if you were cold, and you tremble. Go and warm yourself. I want you to please your uncle and aunt."

"Anything for your sake, dearest," and Ethel was now sprawled on the hearthrug tumbling her cherished muslin, while she kissed affectionately the hand of the aged lady, and rested her head on her knee to be caressed.

"Oh, Grannie! I know no one will ever love me as you do and Nellie, and Dora will know so much more than I do, and her governess will look down on me."

"I flatter myself, Ethel, that you are in better hands than those of any French mercenary your uncle may pick up for his daughter, but—there they are—I hear wheels," and the blind old lady felt all the reminiscences of the past, the long absence of her son, and now her own blindness rush in confusion and tumult over her. Visibly

she was shaken, although she tried to reassure Ethel, who had almost demolished her new dress, and considerably disarranged her coiffure already ; she jumped up however, shook out the crumples from her skirts, and had smoothed her hair at the glass, when the travellers were heard in the hall.

“Go and meet them, dear.”

“O Grannie, come too, and let me lead you.”

So the elder lady, leaning on Ethel, advanced to meet her son, whom she had not seen for years, and could never see again. He had been living in Italy, and had now returned to reside at Chetwynd Park, so he had said ; but although a visit in the course of time was a very natural event, one to which they had looked forward, this suddenly announced inroad of the whole party at a moment's warning and for a long visit, took even the old lady herself aback, and set Mrs. Mildmay in alarm for Ethel ; she knew the interests of uncle and niece were diametrically opposed—she knew—well, it was of little consequence *what* she knew, since the very dread that Robert should suspect her knowledge filled her with dismay ; but she dreaded the issue of the visit for Ethel, though she knew nothing of Mrs. Chetwynd.

There was no lack of warmth in the meeting between mother and son. The blind old lady was folded in his arms and as tenderly kissed as if she had been a young child. Then his wife and daughter were embraced by her, while Ethel, shy and miserable, stood where she had relinquished her grandmother to her uncle.

There is no feeling so painful as the unreasoning, self-conscious shyness of a girl at Ethel's age; neglect, and too much observation, are both equally painful. Two or three kind words would have reassured her now, but they came not.

Robert Chetwynd stared at her, and said, "I suppose you are Ethel,"—and as he then looked towards his wife and daughter, behind whom was "mademoiselle," when he had said this, Ethel concluded he meant it for an introduction. There was a cold blighting glance in his eye, and a tone in his voice which froze all that was left in her of self-command. Lady Agnes could not see the first, though her quick ear detected the other; she said, "Yes, that is my Ethel, my prop, my comfort, my friend and companion; is she not tall for her age?"

"Tall! She is no end of a girl, I should say," and Robert stuck his eyeglass under one of his

brows, and smiled impertinently at his niece, though with what he meant for jocular patronage.

"Come, come Robert, my little girl is too young and too shy to bear your saucy jokes yet. Ethel, it is your uncle's way, and you will get accustomed to it in time. Take your aunt and cousin to their rooms;—Marion, you must accept Ethel as my deputy in all things. I never go about the house, my child."

"Oh, thank you. I shall soon make myself at home without help from any one." But as Mrs. Chetwynd did not know her way yet, she was obliged to submit to Ethel's company at first, though she refused to recognize the kindly welcome intended in her personal attendance.

She was a short woman, with well-cut features, sharp black eyes, and thin lips,—dressed in the height of the fashion of the day, including a crinoline of fabulous circumference, hitherto unknown in those secluded parts. She looked bored and wearied and out of temper. Ethel turned to her little cousin hoping for something more congenial, but there too she was disappointed. She saw a cold, supercilious, prematurely worldly little face, a ridiculous reproduc-

tion of her mother's, though from its extreme youth, the elfish knowingness of the expression seemed more offensive. The only child of her parents, Dora had been the victim of their continued and injudicious solicitude. She had been trained, and drilled, and exercised in calisthenics and dancing, until her simplest action seemed a rehearsal of some well-practised movement. If she turned round, it was in a pirouette, and the motions of her head and arms a perpetual though unconscious reproduction of some shawl dance or minuet, while the management of her eyelids and lips would have done credit to an experienced actress. She looked critically at Ethel's extent of person with a side glance from under her drooping lashes, reflected on her father's comment, curled up her little lip into an assenting smile, and then pirouetted to Made-moiselle, and said in French,

"Although she *has* two ends, in spite of what papa says, they are very far apart."

On this the governess as usual expressed her delight at the wit of her pupil ("*esprit*") by a "*Fi donc!*" She told her it was very cruel to say such sharp things of the "*Pauvre longue mees. Gauche, mais aimable peut-être.*"

And as Ethel understood every word of this, her self-possession was not increased. She walked along the corridor with an intolerable consciousness of the length of her legs—of their being in each other's way, and a profound conviction that her arms were an encumbrance of which she would like to divest herself. She compared Dora's glisading, pirouetting gait, with her own "shambling," as she called it, and was convinced on the spot that her cousin was a model of elegance and grace—but—

"Thank you, Ethel. That will do," and she was dismissed at Mrs. Chetwynd's door. She turned to Dora again, but the little impish creature looked up at her, and then pointed to her maid,—

"Melanie is waiting to conduct us to our apartments, you need not come any further."

Where could she go? Not back to her drawing-room, where her uncle was *tête-à-tête* with his mother, but into her own two rooms over her grandmother's which were fitted up for her with loving care by the old lady's directions.

Here, before a cheval glass, she contemplated with dismay the "no end of a girl," and gave a tearful assent to Dora's comment.

"She is quite right about it, yet she must be a nasty creature to say such an ill-natured thing of me before I ever offended her; but I will try and show her I don't mind what she says—she is terribly small of her age!"

And Ethel tried to comfort herself with this reflection until it occurred to her it was wrong.

"I am as bad as she is, and I won't make a fool of myself any more."

So she washed away her tears, and returned to the drawing-room in time to join the party on its progress to dinner.

Here matters progressed as they generally do at a first solemn family meeting after years of separation, during which interests have diverged into different grooves, when each member has his own individual grievance peeping out from under the terribly thin and tattered covering under which they are all "making believe very hard" to hide them. Each knows that the others have long ago explored beneath the surface of things, and understand the motive powers and main-springs they are each trying to conceal; and each knows that the slightest breath disturbing the calm of the domestic atmosphere would remove that thin curtain, and disclose the wicked

skeletons of which they are all pretending ignorance. The very effort to postpone the inevitable catastrophe throws a wet-blankety sort of solemn propriety over the scene.

Lady Agnes, with the *savoir faire* of her position, led the conversation to Naples, then groaning in her last throes before relieving herself of the Bourbon yoke,—she talked of anything rather than of themselves or even of Chetwynd Park, the very name of which made her sigh. She felt it was the pause before the battle—a battle she would have to fight again, and that too with an only son. Her mother's feelings inclined her to rejoice at his return, and at having his wife and daughter under her roof for the first time, but her delight was tempered by a dread of a recurrence of old scenes she would fain forget. He was her only son, she must love him,—but—there was a something between that mother and son which, “put it behind her” as she would, still insisted on coming forward, rising up grimly and standing between her and the trust and confidence she yearned to repose in him. Intangible as the something was which for fifteen years had made a gulf between them (for she dare not to herself give it form), it stood there now a chasm covered

by a formless shadow, which no love could span. Mrs. Chetwynd had been brought to the Priory against her will, by the imperious fiat of her husband, and was sulky for the present, and desponding for the future, in which however, shimmered a tiny *ignis fatuus*, which had been almost extinguished by Lady Agnes's first words.

The future was, generally speaking, beyond the orbit of Marion's speculations; "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof," had been paraphrased to "Sufficient for the day is the *pleasure* thereof," and she congratulated herself on the wit of her improvement.

She had invariably acted on the principle, it had governed her expenses,—and if virtue is its own reward (and *vice versâ*), she was now reaping the crop she had sown; for had not her improvidence and extravagance hastened the crisis which compelled her husband to think, not only of the future, but of the present, this obnoxious visit might have been postponed until he made it necessary himself at some distant period. But Marion would take no blame to herself, she never did; she only bewailed her lot, and the prospect of living months in that dreadful *triste* place, and in winter too! and her countenance was a pretty fair index to her feelings.

Dora always copied her mother. She was, as a facetious friend once said, "a sort of improved and fanciful edition of her parent, a duodecimo edition, bound in calf, with a Parisian stamp on it." Dora was convinced that it was imperatively necessary for her to draw down the corners of her mouth, hold her head on one side, and occasionally throw her eyes to the ceiling, giving vent to plaintive sighs from time to time,—this was "being *triste*," and Dora was satisfied, not that she was enacting, but that she was enduring martyrdom with exemplary fortitude.

She had been forbidden to cultivate any intimacy with "the girl who lived with her grandmother," otherwise she might have rushed impetuously into loving Ethel, but with this warning, and her father's contemptuous conduct, she inferred that Ethel was beneath her, and then all her grand airs were called into requisition, "to keep her in her own place,"—still, it was trying to be in the house with another girl, and not associate with her. Pride and thirst for companionship were at war within her, and made her forbidding when she was not ridiculous.

Robert Chetwynd was the best satisfied of the party. He had his way for the present; he had

forced his wife to obey him; he had done as he had pleased so far, and had made the first move in a game he intended to play. As yet there was no counter-move to check him. If there was a creature on earth he loved—in his way—it was his mother. He felt that every association that was good or great about her shone back with reflected light on himself. She was an earl's daughter, and brought him thus into blood-relationship with the peerage. The higher the pinnacle upon which she was placed, the higher he was raised; nevertheless she was only a puppet, which he intended to work for his own ends.

There were but two classes of women, according to his creed;—bad women, who by their wiles and fascinations ruled men to their destruction, and good women, who were the slaves and ministering spirits to the wiles of their husbands or male relatives. He could not recognize the possible existence of a woman with a strong will, high principles, and singleness of purpose. He had been told of their existence, but nevertheless did not believe in them, and Robert pooh-poohed everything not convenient for him to believe. There was always something under their best acts. They might be serpents or they

might be doves, but they could not unite the two natures ; so, to be worthy in his opinion, a woman must be very little removed above the level of a fool.

His wife quite realized his theory ; his daughter promised fairly ; his mother would, he trusted, eventually do so, by yielding herself up to his guidance in business affairs. It was only by stratagem, however, she could be netted, and therefore nothing could be more affectionate than his manner to her ; and he even unbent to Ethel, when he saw a contrary course would offend the old lady, whose ear caught the slightest inflection of voice, and felt its import. All his efforts, however, were unavailing that first evening ; he could not dispel the icy damp which pervaded the whole party. His jokes fell flat, and every one was glad when the first evening was over.

"Thank goodness, that is over !" ejaculated Ethel, as she threw herself into a chair after the last "good nights" had been said, and she was once more in her room alone.

"I'm not afraid of them now ; they are too ill-bred ; and yet, after living in Paris and Italy and everywhere, they should know better. I don't think Aunt Marion is as nice as Nellie ;

I am sure Nellie is more ladylike, more like Grannie in her manners, and no one can be above Grannie in that particular. And yet—and yet—Uncle Robert is her own child, and I am only a grandchild. Will she love him best now? and—no, I don't think she will love Dora as much as she loves me; she is too true and steadfast to give me up. I think—but—oh, how wicked it all makes me feel!" And then, having come to the end of her preparations for bed as she arrived at this last conclusion, she threw herself on her knees to pray. She was too excited to frame her ideas into words; all she knew was that she wanted help—help which no mortal hand could give her—help to think and feel, as well as to act, rightly.

"I am jealous, I am envious, I am wicked, full of wicked thoughts about them all, and after all the good I have been taught! Oh, strengthen me to feel what is right as well as to do what is right by them all!"

And then, as sleep stole over her, contorted pictures of her own long arms, and more lengthy skirts, and Dora's flounces, crinolines, and short petticoats, and whirling attitudes, flitted before her, chasing each other, now for her uncle's eye-

glass, which assumed strange proportions, then for her father's picture, which somehow got involved in the confusion of her fancies. Suddenly she started up and rubbed her eyes, and realized the actual facts of her position. She sat up in bed for a few moments, thinking; then she threw herself back on her pillow, as she mentally consigned her spirit once more to her Father above.

"Guide me! strengthen me! shield me!" As she drew the covering over her, a sort of faint fanciful idea of angels' wings overshadowing her, and protecting her from all harm, came stealing over her spirit; and, mingling the real with the spiritual, she fell asleep peacefully, as a young child in her mother's arms, but she had ever felt their embrace.

CHAPTER V.

FAMILY ANTECEDENTS.

I ALWAYS like to know who people are before I permit any intimacy. Those who veil their antecedents in mystery are generally to be mistrusted. They have either something disgraceful to hide, or are snobs, ashamed of their parents, and wanting to seem something they are not. Now and then a stray mysterious stranger may have a secret grief, which, for the sake of other people, they may wish to hide; but, as a rule, don't trust one of them. Mystery is the child either of sin or of folly; and Dr. Johnson has said somewhere, "A man of many mysteries is a fool." But every rule has its exception; and therefore I am prepared to think of Mr. Caleb Williams with

a charitable hope that he *may* be all right, and this feeling is increased by a sentiment of pity for the man, marked by Mrs. Grymes for exposure.

This most excellent and exemplary Vicaress has "spotted him" as her prey. She has registered a vow to "unearth him," and bring his dark deeds to light; and therefore etiquette obliges me reluctantly to leave him in her hands. The man may be as innocent as he seems, as far as I can hear of his proceedings from the villagers; and if he is, he may defy Mrs. Grymes; but if he is not, then Woolerton will be well rid of an impostor, however questionable may be the means used to effect this social and moral boon to a highly virtuous and decorous country neighbourhood. Some day I may help Mrs. Grymes to unravel the mystery of this eccentric photographer; but as it might so happen that Mr. Caleb Williams may turn out "nothing particular," and *le jeu ne vaudrait pas la chandelle*, I shall permit the worthy dame to take precedence of me in the work, and only give my assistance if I find it worth the trouble. At present, Mr. Robert Chetwynd, only son of Lady Agnes Chetwynd, unquestionably the head of his house, and

the representative of the family honour, the last male of his name and branch, is my care. It would require some skill—far more than I can claim—to make a hero of Robert Chetwynd; but as he has intruded his unwelcome presence on our quiet friends at Woolerton, and has come with a fixed determination to work them as puppets for his own ends, I must revert to his antecedents and those of his family, to introduce him properly to my readers.

He, at least, the owner of Chetwynd Park, the heir (if he could redeem it) of Woolerton Priory, needs no mystery, “from his birth to his death.” Mrs. Grymes “would be bound to say there was no need of mystery for him.” A little debt, a little trouble about money, but then “that is all the fashion with the aristocracy,”—no one would think the less of him for it, as long as he keeps his own acres for his own name,—besides, does he not own the presentation of the Vicarage?

I fear I cannot attempt here to do justice to the phraseology of the good dame, whose ideas and opinions had been dropped on her husband's devoted head during his late tea; but I have not wandered from the spirit of her sayings on that memorable evening when the old family chariot

from the Priory swept through Woolerton, followed by a fly and luggage from the station, and turned down the shady road by the river. The sight of these carriages, and the fresh news of the Squire's unexpected arrival, had evoked Mrs. Grymes's sentiments; she had seen the party pass when watching the delinquent damsel whose gossiping had also been the means of her seeing Caleb Williams disappear near the cottage; for, as Mrs. Grymes said, "she had quite enough to do to mind her own business without prying into other people's," and as my especial business at this moment is to give the antecedents of the Chetwynds, as far as they concern the interests of the story, I hope you will have patience to read. I must take Mrs. Grymes's hint, avail myself of her doctrines, if not of her practice, and attend to mine.

* * * *

If the guilty alone suffered the penalties of their misdeeds, we might be content to leave them to gather in whatever harvest it has suited them to sow; but, alas! whoever does reap exactly what he sows for himself? Does the same hand ever gather in the increase of tares it has sown to its own garner? It seems, indeed,

as if the few random grains which reach accidentally his neighbour's fields bear fruit in ten-fold proportion to his own. Wild oats had been the cereal cultivated by the three youths to whose antecedents we must revert to understand Ethel's position towards her uncle Robert—the youngest and only surviving brother,—sons of an austere father, who enlarged on Solomon's Proverb in the training of his children. I have every reverence for that heaven-inspired lawgiver, but I am inclined to think that in modern times his precepts are too literally treated, or that they have suffered in the translation. At all events, in the hands of the paternal Chetwynd they became a signal failure.

This old gentleman was a type of a race now nearly extinct, the traditional fox-hunting squire of the latter end of the last century, who, after a youth of drinking, hunting, and the more questionable rural vices of the day, had, in maturer years, become a disciple of the Regent school, and had proved himself a worthy companion of the illustrious man whom he had elected to follow. As neither gratitude nor constancy were conspicuous among the virtues of the "First Gentleman in Europe," a change came o'er the spirit of

Giles Chetwynd's dream as he saw his broad acres converted, as far as he could convert them by mortgage, into guineas, which guineas found themselves transferred across the gambling-table to the pockets, royal or noble, of those from whom he ceased to receive civility in return; and as his royal master fell slowly from the fictitious pinnacle which vice had reared for his reception, his satellite came to the conclusion it was time to mend his own ways (and means), by making a prudent match in his declining years, and settling down respectably. Cupid is blind, and shoots his darts at random, but it must have been a very eccentric shaft which found its way to the heart of the Lady Agnes Wilbraham, and made her fortune an easy prey to the *blasé ci-devant* courtier. She had a good fortune, and had been a toast for some seasons, though a "secret engagement," "a tender attachment," or some equally probable reason, had been ascribed for the lady's remaining still unwed; one or two coronets had been rejected, and that only in order to leave Lady Agnes Wilbraham an easy prize to Giles Chetwynd! "Chance," or "luck," or "destiny," or whatever name the worldly give to the decrees of Providence, ordained, that in

one of those fitful moods, to which even the wise are sometime subject, Lady Agnes should be thrown into Mr. Chetwynd's company during a Christmas-party in a country house, where they were all snowed up. The fact that she had disdained her Prince's admiration, and allowed him to know her opinion of him, naturally piqued the loyal subject into an attempt at flirtation, to while away the wintry days, even if nothing more came of it. Where was her good angel? Surely offended, or at a distance, for he was not there to warn her from her fate. Some skeletons were buried out of sight for ever, and Lady Agnes took up the cross she was to bear, in one shape or another, to her grave. She became Giles Chetwynd's wife, and her money paid his debts, but she did not lose it thereby. The Priory and other properties were secured to her, until they could be redeemed by the tenant-for-life of the other portions of the estate. The Priory was to be her dower-house for life, absolutely, and then hers to will, failing the repayment of the money, for which she held it in pledge.

Chetwynd Park, the larger estate, was situated on the South Coast. It was strictly entailed on the male heir, except under peculiar

contingencies. If heirs male failed within certain degrees, then a daughter might inherit, preserving the family name, which her heirs were to assume.

Men of Mr. Chetwynd's calibre seldom do things by halves. His old habits of life had palled on him, but he was a man of too restless a temperament to subside quietly into a calm, well-ordered respectability of life.

Fully appreciating his wife's beauty himself, he was jealous, often to an insane degree; and her early days of matronhood, while they mingled in the respectable world of London, were intersected by what in more modern times would be termed "hard lines" for her.

A very fashionable preacher of the ultra Evangelical school at this time was drawing crowded houses. There must have been something exciting, almost sensational, in the novelty of hearing, Sunday after Sunday, an accurate description of the pit already prepared to engulf you; to hear of the fire now burning and awaiting you, not to consume, but to torture you for ever. Giles Chetwynd went to hear of these things, having "turned over a new leaf," as he said, and thinking the old-fashioned preachers flat, where

he had dropped in occasionally of late with his wife. He was stimulated to go now continually, and by some process beyond the writer's power of understanding and description, Giles Chetwynd was "converted," so he said, at least, and so he thought. At all events, he took that sudden header into the bosom of the elect, called by the good men of that line of the Church "conversion." Let the word stand as it is, to mean what it is meant for, as long as those holy words "born again" are not desecrated by any association with such men as Giles Chetwynd, who to the end of his days appeared as far from that holy visitation of the Spirit as in the wildest days of his early and disreputable life; but he had made the plunge, and henceforth his activity was turned into a different channel. His gentle wife bore the first brunt of the tempest of zeal stirred up in his soul. She, whose "new birth," to judge her by a Scripture standard, must have taken place in those early mysterious days when the souls of little children "drew near to God," was denounced by him as a "miserable sinner," and threatened with that black pit from which her husband said he had secured his escape!

There has always been a fashion even in reli-

gion. Those grand, eternal truths seem too sublime for men to realize, unless dressed up in some familiar, perhaps even tawdry garb, the feeble efforts of man's hands, the results of men's conceits. Now we have ritual to excite us to controversy. A few years ago the more elevated truths of the High Church movement were rousing the sleeping Orthodox from their sluggish repose, and calling forth a "No Popery" cry. In the days of which I speak, infidelity or utter indifference would have reigned triumphant but for the zeal of excellent men, more or less allied to Wesley and others, who had been intemperately hunted from the Church. If a man took a turn, and became serious and earnest, there really seemed no fold open to him but the Evangelical, and for them he must renounce the world—no half measures, no "liberal views." Theatres, concerts, card parties, balls, everything with them was "sinful;" and that votary who joined them in the flush of excited feelings, and when the reaction was over, found he had not received that miraculous gift to which they all presumptuously laid claim,—had no outlet for his superfluous activity which had formerly found vent in these amusements. What could they all do? Women became backbiters, and

otherwise censorious and wicked during the hours they had once only been frivolous and vain; and men became worse,—cruel, and wicked, and unchristianlike, and that too under the most dangerous and fatal delusion a man can labour under,—the delusion under which the Pharisees rejoiced when denounced by our Lord.

Giles Chetwynd fled from the “City of Abominations,” “Babel,” “Babylon,” it mattered not what name he gave it, as long as it sounded Scriptural, and expressed abhorrence of sin. He took up his permanent residence in his ancestral halls, and devoted his attention to the conversion of his wife and his tenantry. She could not see matters with his eyes. She gave up, however, her round of “dissipation,” and settled herself in her home, meekly determined to bear her fate. She could not utter those words of cant and hypocrisy which would have made her a saint in her husband’s eyes; but her gentle words and unbounded charities healed the wounds which he inflicted on all who came within the orbit of his influence, for he stood as a great scarecrow at the gates of his Church to frighten away, rather than to allure, the timid within its precincts.

For a long time he waged a fierce war against

his rector for omitting to "preach the Gospel" in Bishop's-Chetwynd; and having sold the presentation for a considerable sum, he could not dispossess that most excellent divine of his benefice, his next move was to set up a chaplain of his own, and have a course of prayer meetings, preachings, and other such exercises at Chetwynd Park in opposition to the rector.

Meanwhile three sons and two daughters had been born to them. As little ones, they had been left to cluster round their mother's knee, and to learn from her the path to Heaven; but the time came when their father felt that they were not safe under her gentle sway. The girls she could deal with as she pleased, but the boys were his care. They were to be model men, educated under his own eye by the chaplain for the time being. Occasionally, as these gentlemen failed to accomplish all that was expected of them, the boys went "hithering and thithering" from one parsonage to another, until they were summoned home to try some new tutor. Schools were "sinks of iniquity," at which his hands were raised in holy horror. Home, that is to say the house, was not a lively scene for three restless boys. There were no games, or other amuse-

ments, permitted; only a continued round of gloomy or tame exercises, or the mawkish literature of the sect,—they would not read, and they found solace at hand.

All along that part of the coast smuggling was at that time carried on to a considerable extent. Half the tenantry were actively or passively parties to it, and at a very early age these three boys had become the confidants, and often the accomplices of these lawless men. Theirs was a life to fascinate, and claimed the sympathies of youths whose restless energies might have been turned to better account. Pent up within the precincts of their own property, a stealthy meeting, with one or more of the heroes of their local romances, was a treat never to be declined. “A run” was an expedition witnessed, if not taken part in more than once by them, and in later times brandy, cigars, and gloves, were surreptitiously obtained through these questionable channels, and valued according to the risk in obtaining them.

The constant friction of incompatible tempers had effectually alienated the affections of father and sons; and although Lady Agnes still held the first place in their affections, she was never

permitted to exercise any control over them, except that indirect influence their love might give her.

Though admiring her as the crowning ornament of his *ménage*, it was Mr. Chetwynd's custom to depreciate his wife's intellect in that mild, patronizing, affectionate way which is infinitely more effectual than positive abuse. "He must know her to be a fool, or he would never treat her thus before her sons; and she must be one to stand it." This, at least, was the opinion of Giles Chetwynd, her first-born; an opinion arrived at by that slow and silent process always the most lasting; an opinion which becomes, as it were, a part of a man's nature, and which no evidence to the contrary can quite uproot. Giles copied his father, and patronized his mother, but she had no influence over his character. He went to Oxford a raw youth from home, and at the end of two years, after incurring large debts, he was advised to absent himself for the future. Eventually Giles died, young and unmarried, from the effects of dissipation. He lived to see great changes in his family, for before death claimed him, Charlie, his second brother, had run his brief and stormy career, and left a little daugh-

ter, his sole bequest, to his mother, and Robert succeeded him.

A noble, golden-haired boy, with all his mother's beauty, Charlie had been her idol; and his warm, impetuous character, and sensitive disposition, if it had been permitted to expand under genial influences, would have matured into a manhood, in which both parents might have found consolation for the shortcomings of the eldest. But his failure with his first, only made Mr. Chetwynd more strict and exacting with his second son, consequently nothing but his love for his mother, and perhaps the crafty prudence of his youngest brother, prevented Charles from joining the smugglers, and beginning a life of adventure, which had a great fascination for him. Robert was, or at least seemed to be, the good boy of the family; he was never caught in any of the escapades for which his brothers paid so dearly, and consequently he was permitted far greater liberty of action. He was the little Benjamin of the old man's declining years, as far as he could unbend to make him so; and if Robert did spend nights on the shore occasionally, smoke contraband cigars, and drink Cognac which never paid duty, and which he kept in secret places, Robert knew no one would betray him.

"If Charlie was such a fool as not to manage better, and Giles such a sot as not to be able to throw dust in the old man's eyes, it was their look out," not his; he was profiting by their experience. So Robert was the acknowledged favourite of the father, while the mother's heart clung to her second born with a tenacity nothing could loosen. He was to be, she said, her comfort in her declining years. Her daughters were younger, and had been placed by her under the charge of her own old governess, as she felt that home, as it was in their house, was no place for them. "A family of cats, with their fur brushed back," was Charlie's simile, in alluding to the normal condition of their household.

Lady Agnes bemoaned it; but she was not a managing woman;—say what you will, principle, and a high sense of duty and responsibility, of obedience especially, are all so many impediments in the way of managing a husband. Becky Sharp might have turned the Squire round her little finger, but Lady Agnes felt it to be her duty to submit,—she was always taking up cudgels for Charlie, to have her cudgels as invariably wrested from her grasp by her husband and youngest son, who, while he always seemed to be advocating his

brother's cause, was as continually and as surely (as if by force of his love of truth) making the most damaging admissions against him; and poor Charlie, with his frank, open face, and injudicious veracity, always managed to sink himself deeply into some mire over the surface of which he had only at first trodden lightly.

"That young scapegrace, your ladyship's son," was the old gentleman's usual designation for poor Charlie when speaking of him to his mother.

Lady Agnes took heart one day, and determined to make a bold stroke for *her* son. She wrote to her cousin Lord Avon, who now represented her family, and asked him to get him a commission in the army. She thought, and thought wisely, that in the army he would find a legitimate outlet for his superfluous, ill-directed excitability of character. It was a bold step,—the first and only one she ever took of so momentous a nature. In after years, when she thought of it, and of all that came of it, the fact that *she* had done it, gave poignancy to her grief,—but I must not anticipate. Lord Avon knew his man too well to approach Mr. Chetwynd directly on the subject. He wrote to consult

him about some other affair, but in a postscript offered his interest to obtain a commission for Charles. He even wrote to Lady Agnes to entreat that she would not interfere, or prevent her son from entering on an honourable career. The bait took. Mr. Chetwynd was stroked down until, as Charlie said, "there was not a rebellious hair erect." He purred forth his gratification, told Lady Agnes it was useless for her to remonstrate, and Charlie Chetwynd's name was put down and his money lodged for his commission.

It was about the fortieth year of this century (dates here are not necessary) when, under the freezing influence of a long peace, our army had reached the climax of reduction. It had been "cut down," "disbanded," "reduced," and "shelved," until no more was to be done actively; but old officers declared that even the remaining skeleton was to be starved into dissolution. The Great Duke had not forged the thunderbolt yet, which some years after burst on the nation in the shape of his celebrated letter on our unprotected state. The name of "Joinville" was not yet a terror to old ladies who had read of the battle of Hastings, and feared a repe-

tition of that bloody scene. All was *entente cordiale* with our Gallic neighbours, and Spanish marriages had not been thought of. There was "something doing in India," but the "Sick Man" was then convalescent, and the Crimea undreamt of as a field for British laurels. It was the ebb-tide after Waterloo; so, even with his cousin to back him, Charlie had to wait.

Lord Avon was "the best fellow in the world,"—so his friends said,—and having taken Charles in hand, he determined to give him a holiday while he was waiting, so he invited him to his place in a western county for the shooting.

As a bird let out of a cage was Charlie Chetwynd then, just twenty-one, and for the first time taking wing from the thorny paternal nest! His mother shed tears over him, and entreated him "to be good," and not to do anything to displease his father, and Charlie meant honestly to keep the promise he volunteered on the occasion, that he "would give him no cause to repent his indulgence." But Charlie had not measured his own strength yet. His exuberant animal spirits, the cause of those trivial faults, dignified or degraded into vices by his father, now fairly carried him away. Very

taking indeed was the handsome young man, with his winning, unaffected manners, and gleeful temper. Old gentlemen patted him on the back, and old ladies encouraged his attentions middle-aged dames petted him, and girls fell in love with him, and hated each other fiercely for the time, in rivalry for his smiles. Was it any wonder then that Charlie was intoxicated with pleasures so new to him, though stale and uninteresting to more experienced men?

A pair of tender grey eyes, fringed deeply with black, did fatal work on his young heart meanwhile; and, to do him justice, he was not slow in revealing the nature of his wounds, and seeking for a balm to heal them. Early morning walks, rides, picnics, and archery parties afforded opportunities then, although croquet had not come to the aid of forlorn damsels and shy youths. Oblivious of parental authority on either side, of all and everything in the world save their love, they vowed eternal fidelity, and gave themselves up to a delicious dream. It was the "jolliest experience" either had ever known, and the young girl, in her pure, soft, winning way, gave herself up to Charlie's teachings, and had no misgivings as to his wisdom. She had no mother,

poor thing; her father idolized her after some stern fashion of his own, she being his only child; but at this time she was on a visit with a school-friend, and his Argus eyes were not on her,—more was the pity for all! The party broke up; but Charlie was to go to town in the season, and so, as London was her home, Edith was not inconsolable. The “bread-and-butter flirtation” had been duly remarked, laughed at, and dismissed. An ensign expectant was not a marrying man; boys were always falling into love and getting out of it, and Lord Avon intended Charlie’s handsome face to get him a prudent match when he was old enough, and when perhaps his mother might make some arrangement about the Priory for him. That little Douglas girl *might* answer, but it was time enough to think of such things.

Charlie went to town in spring, and, under his relative’s auspices, plunged into the vortex of gay society. In these scenes he occasionally met his Edith, and in time obtained an *entrée* to her father’s house.

CHAPTER VI.

A WISE PAIR.

MR. DOUGLAS was a wealthy Scot; not a man of very high family, but one who had made his own money, and, having returned to his native shire and purchased an estate from an embarrassed nobleman, found that the liberty of thus intruding on an exclusive neighbourhood was resented by his new neighbours. He would not brook the slights shown him as a *parvenu*; he left the Highlands, and, turning south, took his little daughter with him. In London money commands a position, and when Edith was old enough to come out, he had secured a standing which ensured her a good reception among the votaries of fashion. He had placed her at an

expensive boarding-school, and in this way she formed some intimacies. Now she had a lady who was supposed to fill the office of *chaperone*; but it was evident that the good dame troubled herself very little with Edith's doings; she had some little love affairs of her own, over which Mammon rather than Cupid presided, and therefore she was utterly unconscious of the danger which beset her charge.

Edith, too, had acquired at school a quality which did her good service now, if anything could be called "good" which favoured the imprudent intimacy. Edith Douglas was *sly*—I use the word, wishing I could think of one as applicable but more complimentary—she was sly by nature; not from evil propensities, for of these she was guiltless, but sly by reason of her shyness and timidity, her weakness of character, and boarding-school education, which made her ready to say or do anything to escape her father's anger, or, at school, her governess's rebuke. Had she not loved Charlie, she would have fooled him to her heart's content; loving him, she fooled others to conceal that love. Charlie chafed under it. To see her smiling and giving encouragement to his rivals was a hard trial to him; but he

had to bear it, and in time she made a convert of him to her views.

"You see, dearest," she pleaded, "it is the only way. If papa thought of you as an aspirant, we should soon be severed. Let me humour the wretches. You know, dear, I don't encourage them—not in the least—but how can I help it, if they will worry me? It is so tame and unromantic and prosy,—but I bear it for your sake; and it is so delicious to think how little any of them dream of the truth! Even the duenna believes I am expiring for Charlie Pocklington, and I let her think so, dear."

Charlie would have manfully appealed to Mr. Douglas, who called him a "boy," and asked him to dinner as Lord Avon's cousin, but Edith pleaded tearfully against it.

"Let us go to Gretna Green, dearest; it would be such fun to think of the state they would all be in when the bird was flown, and Downie would, I think, proceed at once to Charlie Pocklington's chambers to see if he was the delinquent! No, Charlie! I should like to go off, and be married on the sly, and tell no one until it was too late; and then arguments would be useless, and there would be no fuss,—and then papa would have the

knot tied again, to satisfy his pride and love of show, in the usual orthodox fashion. It would be *delicious*, and so uncommon! Oh! if you knew how I dread those scenes with papa! I have fought off two already: a dreadful man from the City, dearest—and another, really ‘unexceptionable party,’ if I only liked him; birth, estate, and tolerable good looks, too, if I had never seen you. I must temporize a little; you see, I am supposed to be an heiress, unless the charming Mrs. Downie takes papa into her meshes, or he marries some one else, to punish me,—and then he would not cut me off with a shilling, I believe.”

It was a terrible descent from the ecstasy of disinterested love for Charlie to have to think of money at all; yet, how could he marry without it? A certain instinct told him that Edith was no strong-minded heroine, and that, in a fair encounter with her father, she would yield at once. He would not commit the sacrilege of doubting her, not for worlds—but— If this eligible were pressing, and the father firm, Edith would succumb, and be a tearful victim to parental cruelty for sheer lack of *will*. Charlie did not put the terrible truth in such homely language, but he

was conscious of inexpressible torments which a certainty of her firmness would have dispelled. She loved him better than any one else, and would dissemble for his sake; had even offered to run away with him, but she had no moral courage to fight boldly for him. Poor darling, how could she? Poor little timid darling, how could he expect her to be brave? Did he not love her better for her weakness?

The idea of Gretna Green had been started in fun,—Edith never meant it at the time,—but it worked like leaven in Charlie's rash, inconsiderate brain. To secure his prize beyond risk of losing her, and then to ask demurely for what was his own, seemed a charming innovation on prosaic every-day weddings. He, too, shrank from the withering tongue of his own father, and all that he should endure from him; so they both took very early walks in Kensington Gardens, and occasionally met "by accident," and talked of such possibilities until their minds became reconciled to such a step, if necessary; and while a feather would have turned the scale on either side, a popular drama, which at the time was taking a run, decided the question for ever.

There was the usual cruel father and rich

suitor, the tearful victim and the favoured lover ; Gretna Green was proved to be an unnecessary excursion, and after an early morning's walk the intended victim returns, accompanied by her husband, and the curtain drops on a scene where not only the cruel father, but the rich suitor, are seen blessing the kneeling pair, and advancing their fortunes *sur-le-champ*.

Edith went every night she could to see it, and dreamed of it all when she came home to bed ; and Charlie, not with her, of course, but with one or other of his own friends, went too, night after night ; and then he talked of it, and he heard dissertations on the method of effecting these secret unions, and the legal view of them, and then his imagination, too, was fired. "What a rich sell it would be for those two undesirable old gentlemen !"

Charlie was not revengeful, but he felt that, when the day came upon which he suddenly presented his wife to his father, and that, when it was too late for him to have a hand in the affair, it would compensate to him for years of boyish trouble ; and it would not be very criminal after all. "I am to have a profession ; and am old enough to choose for myself ; and she has, or will

have, I suppose, 'tin' enough to help a little, even if the old gentleman does cut me off with a shilling. And then his mother; well, *she* would like Edith, and she would make the best of it, and try to make peace; and when it was irrevocable, what could they do? He was nervous, *decidedly* nervous; but as a boy taking for the first time a bold, decided step. And what would Edith think of him if he held back? She was ready to run off with him, and she would despise him if he were not game to do what she dared attempt. And so it came to pass that, after seeing the 'Clandestine Marriage' (I believe I am correct as to the name of the play) once more, they determined to go and do likewise. How they managed to tie the indissoluble knot will be told elsewhere. All that I can tell you now is that it was done, and that Charlie showed more address in this, his first attempt at a plot, than his previous life would have led us to imagine.

Edith flirted with eligibles, and slighted her "boyish lover" and patronized him by turns, while her wedding-ring hung by a ribbon next her heart. What recked either of to-morrow? Were they not both intoxicated with the success

of their scheme, and revelling in their secret? Was not Mr. Douglas in Scotland, where he had been called suddenly? and was not Mrs. Downie angling for a stockbroker, one of Mr. Douglas's friends in the City? It was, as Edith said, "*delicious*." No one to pry too closely.

"I must be gazetted first, make sure of my commission, and then I will ask for you, my own."

"But, Charlie, you must promise not to tell your people. It must come like a blow on papa first, and then he will be only too glad to have it all over properly and cover his checkmate; and when he tells yours that he will give me as much money as I want, then they won't object. Promise not to tell them first. I do so wish it were all over, and no fuss."

Poor giddy Edith! so like a boarding-school miss, with the precocious romance of her class, and the ignorance of a child!

Lord Avon was engrossed in Parliamentary affairs,—Lady Avon did not know much of Charlie's doings; had he been a girl, she would have revelled in her office of *chaperone*. As he was a young man, and did his duty to her irreproachably in the shape of *petits soins*, etc., it

never occurred to her that he was in mischief. In the midst of this, Mr. Chetwynd came to town. He took it into his head that Charlie would get into bad habits, and that paternal rule once thrown off would never be again endured. He abhorred the "godless routine" of his son's life; and so, after attending a few May meetings, he "marched off the young scapegrace" to Chetwynd Park, despite the pleadings of Lord Avon.

I shall not attempt to describe the dismay of the silly pair. Their dream of bliss was dispelled.

"For a time, a time only, my own one." So he said, as they took a last tender farewell in one of those retired corners which seem to invite these tender *têtes-à-tête* in some houses arranged for a grand fête.

"When shall I see you again? When will you see papa?" for Edith now wished "that scene" over.

"Very soon, darling; I could not live long without you; but I *must* go now, to propitiate my people. The governor has been making a row about tin; said I was extravagant and had spent too much. He little knows how much more I

spent, and which my darling mother sent me from her own purse. Edie, I hope you understand money, for I don't; I declare I have no idea how mine has all gone."

"Understand it! Of course I know how to choose my own clothes, but as to housekeeping—well, I shall find out; I'll get Nursie to come and help us; only don't try my patience, you naughty boy." And so, with a stolen kiss, they separated, for at six on the following morning, the boy-bridegroom accompanied his father to Chetwynd Park; and soon after, Edith went to Scotland with her father. He had a party of Englishmen with him, to whom he had offered fishing and shooting, and among them were some who had other objects in view,—a prize worth something more than a salmon or a trout. It gave piquancy and security to Edith's position to think that she could not be tempted,—could not be forced to marry one of them. She would wander out on the heather, and, when secure from interruption, draw forth her ring and try it on, and kiss her little hand, and *the* finger especially. "It was very pretty, and very romantic, and *deliciously* sly," she said to herself; but, as every dark cloud has its silver lining, so every bright one has its

deep shadow,—it was the deceitful shimmer of the cloud which was to cast its shadow over her young life which beguiled Edith now.

Lady Agnes was never very keen sighted, mentally or physically ; already the gloom of her coming misfortune was upon her,—her eyes were failing her ; mentally, she was slow to see beyond the surface of things, but her maternal instincts told her now that some great crisis had passed in her son's life, since he left home the second time ; yet the more she sought his confidence, the more he shrank from giving it, and he even avoided his mother in the fear of being tempted to betray himself. Charlie was sobered now,—awake to the perilous position in which he had placed the girl he was bound by his manhood to shield from a breath of reproach. What would they all think of him ? what would they think of her ? True, she had led him on, and had met him halfway ; but, poor darling ! she was so young, and knew no better,—did not know the bitter world as he, a man, should have known it, and *did not*. “ Would that I could tell her all ! ” had been his mental ejaculation as he looked on his mother's noble, wistful face. When he looked back on the events of the last few months, it

seemed to him as if he had rushed madly to a precipice, and having blindly cleared some frightful abyss, saw now, that to retrieve the fatal leap was hopeless.

It *was* hopeless,—so Charlie concluded that his best plan would be to wait for his commission; that once obtained, and a retreat to his regiment secured, he could better stand the “scene” which was sure to come off sooner or later. He would have his pay and his barrack-room, and if both parents cut them off with a shilling, there would be his barrack-room and his pay, and with Edith it would be a paradise. Wealth did not make his mother happy, and he had heard of happiness in poverty. He had promised Edith, or he would gladly have thrown himself on his mother’s neck, as in old times, not very long ago, and have implored her protection for his wife,—have implored her to screen her from the effects of their mad escapade, and to promote a regular decorous union between them. The poignant shame of the thing struck him now for the first time,—what the world would say of his wife; how the finger of scorn might be pointed at her, if the thing was not judiciously arranged. But he had *promised* not to tell; he could im-

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plicitly trust his mother's heart, of her head he was not quite so certain. He felt that he could not be sure how far her unswerving sense of duty might oblige her to betray him to his other parent, who seemed to like him least of all his family. So Charlie moved about the grounds, all his old life and spirit gone. His native refinement kept him from Giles, his habits and associates, while Robert would not trust him with his confidence, for Robert had his little secrets which it was not convenient that the "mother's pet" should "chatter about." Robert had a sovereign contempt for the open, honest character of his brother, so the two young men tacitly agreed to keep apart,—each too much engrossed with their own private affairs to take much heed of the other's doings.

Those grey cliffs which offer a welcome to so many home-sick Britons on their return to their native island, rose high and bold on the part of the coast on which the Chetwynd property was situated. The base of one bold promontory rested on Chetwynd park, and was included in the domain, here the country fell in undulating slopes, inland towards the river,—the Otter. This river meandered, at the back of the cliffs, through

meadows for some miles, until it found its way by a succession of rapids and cascades through an opening in the cliffs, and thus reached the sea. At the mouth of this river, below the falls, was a little cove or harbour for fishing-boats, called "Ottermouth." Here resided those fishermen who professed among themselves to think "all things were fish which came to their nets."

The scenery both inland and towards the sea was charming, and varied for miles round, but Charlie liked to betake himself to a particular spot on the cliff, and from thence spy at the ships going up and down Channel. It was a sort of lazy excuse for occupation while his mind gloomily brooded over his fate and *hers*. A fresh anxiety, one which almost overwhelmed him, had recently been added to the complication of his position, and there was a race between two coming events of his life. Now and then he contrived to hear from his wife, and from mysterious hints he concluded that concealment must soon be abandoned, and that little scheme of an entirely new courtship and marriage was now impracticable; and he heard, too, that he would soon get his commission! Could he risk the chance? All that was dear to him hung on the

issue, and these were the questions which, day after day, occupied the young man, while perched on an elevated ledge, beneath some stunted trees which formed a sort of shade, and under which a rustic stone bench had been formed. It was in a sort of cleft or indentation in the cliff, the two "Teeth" on either side being a conspicuous and distinctive landmark at sea. Through this cleft a footpath ran direct to the house. There was another path at right angles, which wound round the face of the cliff, yielding of course to its various bends. Always on the edge of the precipice, and overhanging a stony beach, which, at high tides, was covered by the sea, there were places where, instead of going over, it passed in front of the higher elevations. "The Teeth" were an instance of this,—here, this rather unpleasant promenade, instead of ascending these peaks, passed in front of them at the level of the seat in the cleft. It was only two or three feet wide; but those who made use of it were accustomed to far more perilous paths by sea and land. It was a trying path to any one with a weak head or uncertain step,—a fatal pathway as the events proved to more than one.

CHAPTER VII.

“OVER OTTERCLIFF.”—WILFUL MURDER.

It was Sunday—a bright, clear, late English summer Sunday. The birds carolled in the trees; for miles round the bells from church to church re-echoed from hill to hill their invitations to prayer, and people could be seen in the distance, like specks, already winding their way towards the house of God across meadows or along the shady hedgerows,—here and there stopping to pick wildflowers, or to see how soon the blackberries would be ripe. These people seemed at least to enjoy their holiday, as He who ordained it, I think, intended they should, as a day of *rest*;—rest from the turmoil, the work of life,—and in tasting the joys of the universe thus set before

them. I think, too, they were serving Him more effectually, according to their light, than many who deprecate what they call "a breach of the Sabbath," in a code which seems to me the foolish invention of man, rather than the wise law of Him who made all for our use,—even the Sabbath.

Mr. Chetwynd was a fierce sabbatarian, and Sunday accordingly was a day dreaded in that happy family. Since the death of the old rector, he had installed a man after his own heart in the living of Bishop's Chetwynd, and constituted himself whipper-in for the services, especially as the new rector had done almost as much as his patron to clear the pews of earnest listeners.

On this Sunday, destined to be a sad and memorable one in the Chetwynd family, he had appeared at the breakfast table in an unusually bad temper, and, after managing to ruffle the spirits of all assembled, and excite the "contrariness" of all the younger branches, he began to beat up recruits for church. Lady Agnes was going, (woe to her if she were not!) Giles sulkily said "he might as well," and Robert was ill; but Charlie, chafing under some of his father's remarks, and with every nerve strung to a pain-

ful tension by private anxieties, felt he could not go; his spirit was not in unison with church-going at that moment. The buoyant spirit that at one time would have carried him through a scene was gone now; he was as irritable as his father, only he managed to restrain the outward evidences of his state. Pushed and driven to go—urged to state his reasons—he rose suddenly from the table, left his breakfast untouched, and said, as he left the room, “Unless I can go to church from spontaneous devotion, I am better away. If I am disposed to pray to-day, I can do so best under the glorious vault of heaven. I cannot listen to that canting fellow with common patience.” Could he, could any one, have guessed how those words would be remembered—how they would burn themselves into his own memory—how his mother would think of them, and sigh over them, and wish that those last-remembered tones had been something else; words she could think of and treasure up in her heart with pleasure? Little recked Charlie, as, with his telescope slung over his shooting-coat, he strode across the lawn towards the cliffs. The sight of his figure as he swung himself away, showing his irritation in every gesture, renewed

the old man's ire ; he had been defeated, and the gentler virtues of patience and forbearance were not included in his creed. Forgetful of the *rôle* he had so long enacted, he strode to the window, cursed his rebellious son, and swore he would break his unruly spirit before he was done with him. Then—whether conscience-stricken or not, who shall say ? but he paced up and down the terrace in moody silence till he was joined by his wife and son, with whom he proceeded to church. Here he joined audibly in the responses, jogged Giles when he saw him disposed to somnolency, and was most careful to take down in short-hand the sermon. Giles Chetwynd, senior, could only see in himself a martyr, bearing his cross in the shape of wicked sons, whom it was his duty to convert ; and, if conscience did accuse him, it was generally of some omission in the severity of his rule. He felt that the boys were rapidly passing beyond his influence ; except in money matters, he had no check on them ; and, like a foiled despot, he was sulky and irritable where he believed himself to be meekly bearing his cross. Again he had worked himself into a frenzy on his way home ; he denounced the recreant, and once more swore he would let him know what it was to disobey him.

Tears silently trickled down the cheeks of Lady Agnes, as she leant on his arm, and was jerked hither and thither by the gesticulations in which he indulged. She said nothing. Her heart was unaccountably sad. Could she have had a mysterious warning of what was impending? Could the cloud which was even then hovering over their house have shed its prophetic shadow over her spirit? Who can tell? She only knew, and remembered afterwards, that her heart had been as lead all day, and that, without adequate cause, she was unutterably miserable.

On the previous Saturday night Robert had pleaded a cold as an excuse for retiring early. He had his breakfast in bed, and his tender mother had looked in on him and satisfied herself that there was nothing of consequence the matter then. Now, as they approached the house, they saw Robert coming toward them, looking the picture of death; even Giles saw it, and drew his mother's attention to his appearance.

“Why did you get up, Robert? you look very ill.”

“I only got off the sofa in the library as I saw you coming, and I have not been there long. It is slow work lying in bed all day.”

Then Lady Agnes, who had some medical skill, proposed some domestic remedies for colds. Most unwillingly he allowed her to feel his pulse ; it fluttered wildly. She knew enough to be certain that something was wrong ; she did not like its unequal throbs, the wild gleam of his eye, or the ashen streaks of his face.

Luncheon, meanwhile, was announced. Charlie was still absent, but punctuality was another of Mr. Chetwynd's hobbies, in which he managed to make what was a virtue appear odious. His mother knew that the epitome of the sermon was a thing more to be avoided than the original composition, and therefore rather rejoiced that the meal passed off without the scene which his appearance would infallibly have provoked. Their attention was concentrated on Robert, for Lady Agnes had at once sent for the Doctor.

"The boy is ill, I can see ; more than a common cold. You should have sent for the Doctor last night." (Which, if she had done, he most certainly would have opposed.) It was pleasant to blame some one, and in, the midst of general wrangling, Robert, nothing loath, was sent to bed.

Considerably later than he should have been,

the groom returned ; his countenance was not to be described. He said that Mr. Laidman would be there soon, but that there had been an “accident” on the cliff—an old woman had fallen over and had been killed, and the Doctor was there “examining about it.”

“Killed, did you say? dead? then what the deuce does he mean by delaying? What do the dead require with doctors? My living son requires him more, if he is to be permitted to live much longer.” And the querulous old man began on the Doctor, and left his wife a temporary respite. He had scarcely exhausted himself when the offender arrived, grave, and with some great and painful subject on his mind. He looked yet graver when he had seen his patient.

“Has anything disturbed his mind?” This was the first question.

Here the father answered for him, “Nothing could have done so. He has been in bed all day until just before luncheon, when he got up, but I soon sent him to bed again.”

Unable to account for his symptoms, the Doctor ordered him some sedative, and descended with the father, who had never taken his eyes

from his face, and seeing some great horror depicted there, linked it at once with Robert.

"There is no danger, I hope, Doctor?"

"The greatest danger! He is I hope beyond the reach of the law, poor boy."

"The law, Sir! Allow me to say your language is unaccountable."

"I really beg your pardon, Mr. Chetwynd, but the fact is I have received a terrible shock to-day, and I have been confusing your two—ah—individuals. Mr. Robert Chetwynd, though his pulse is irregular and—ah—peculiar, in fact, is in no danger that I can see; tongue clear, eyes bright—too bright,—nervous system much deranged, symptoms contradictory, but nothing physical to excite anxiety. Not in the drawing-room, if you please, a few moments in your study—in private."

Seated *tête-à-tête*, and face to face, the Doctor knew not where to begin. He had hoped that some rumour of the sad news he had to break might have preceded him, but it was quite evident that, as far as concerned the family, no suspicion of the truth had reached them. He would have to break it as gently as he could. He looked at the man before him, with his querulous old face,

but still in the strength of a healthy old age, and he calculated the probabilities of the effect which his news would have on a constitution he alone had kept in decent repair for more than twenty years. Upon the whole it was a satisfactory retrospection from a professional point of view which occupied the worthy practitioner's mind in the few moments of silence during which he could not find words to begin.

Mr. Chetwynd fidgeted in his chair uneasily; his mind at rest about Robert, he felt that Mr. Laidman's company was a decided inconvenience, so he looked at his watch and said,

"The days are visibly shortening; it is growing dusk."

"Is Mr. Charles Chetwynd at home?"

"I believe not."

"Thank God."

"What right, Sir, have you to 'thank God' for the absence of my son?"

"Because your son is—a—in request at this moment, and in fact there may be some one here to find him. It would be sad to have him 'taken' in the house with his respected parents, a most awkward affair."

"Taken, Sir! What do you mean, Sir, by

your insinuations? I will thank you to be more explicit if you have any communications to make, any observations to make against any member of my family."

For though Mr. Chetwynd was painfully alive to his sons' shortcomings, yet what he condemned in them himself he would not permit others to presume so far as to comment on, to him at least.

"I wish, my dear Sir, to break the matter as delicately as possible, for, believe me, I feel the deepest sympathy for you and for Lady Agnes in this deplorable affair; but the fact is, there has been 'an accident' on the cliff, in front of the Teeth, to an old woman—she was killed, in fact, and unfortunately, a telescope with 'Charles Chetwynd' engraved on it was found near the scene. There were many footmarks, and the appearance of a struggle, but the young gentleman has not been seen since. I make no doubt that he will be able to account for it all; I do not for a moment suspect anything; but the law, Sir, is inexorable. He will inevitably be arrested, and under the circumstances, I would advise, if there is anything extenuating to be urged, that he should surrender at once; it will have a better effect, and put a stop to agony paragraphs in the papers."

The old gentleman sat silently, and heard him to the end.

"And you presume, Sir, to come here under my own roof, and accuse *my* son of *murder*? You *dare* to tell me this in *my own* house!" and the old fire gleamed in his eye, and the aged man stood up and shook his stick at the innocent surgeon.

"My dear Sir, be calm, *be* calm, I entreat. It is better that I, an old friend—a servant, I may say, a dependant almost on your family—should tell you this sad tale than that a stranger should come rudely and do so. We all feel—the whole neighbourhood feels for you in this terrible trial, as it seems now; but we may pull him through, he *may* clear himself, he *may* have by this time given himself up in proper quarters."

After the first burst of unreasoning indignation, he as a magistrate knew what was necessary to be done; he even assisted in the search, swearing that both as a magistrate and a Christian he was bound to give the recreant up to justice.

Robert's room, even under the bed, was searched, while the invalid covered his head with the bedclothes, and shivered as in ague, and it

was with some difficulty he was made to understand the object of the intrusion.

Charlie's own room was visited, too. There it stood as he left it, all his guns, fishing-tackle, and drawings, (for this was an accomplishment he had cultivated in his boyhood, though entirely self-taught). His desk with a few letters, chiefly concerning his commission, his clothes, all were there ready for his return, even his dinner dress, carefully laid out by the servant, who was a sort of general attendant on the three young men; but Charlie Chetwynd was not to be found. No one had seen him since he had left the breakfast-table. He left the house "in a kind of a breeze," as the old butler said; he "knew by the swing of him across the lawn that there had been a squall in the breakfast-parlour, though that was no more than what they was used to, specially Sundays."

Lady Agnes bore the news with speechless consternation, not that she believed her boy guilty, but she knew how hard it often is to contradict circumstantial evidence. One of his boots was taken by the police, and fitted exactly to some of the footmarks where the ground was sufficiently soft to admit of an impression, but

there were other marks which they did *not* fit; still, there was no one else to whom the slightest suspicion could attach.

A volume would not contain all that was said, asserted, or surmised on that memorable Sunday. All the facts that could be sifted from the chaos of idle words were to this effect:—

After leaving home with the telescope in question, the fatal evidence of his *presence* on the scene at all events, the unfortunate young man had gone to his usual perch in the cleft of the cliff. He had been seen from below spying at a lugger which was running in across Channel. This cleft has been described before. It had been used in war-time as a "look-out;" and the coastguard, at a later period, frequented it, and made the dangerous path across the face of the cliff a beat for one of their patrols, who, in stormy weather, could obtain efficient shelter in that elevated little gorge, in which some stunted trees broke the extreme force of the wind. There was a steep path on either side to the extreme heights above ("The Teeth"); but from this lofty headland the whole country sloped down rapidly inland, where abundant cover existed in the woods, which were thus effectually

protected from the force of the Channel storms. In these woods were dense dingly, ferny dells, intersected by tiny watercourses, which fell into the "Otter," before it made its bold sweep round the headland and fell into the sea. This ground lay between the scene of the "murder," as it was called, and Chetwynd Park, and through it the footpath ran, leading to the "Teeth."

The spyglass was found on the ground, near the stone seat.

Nellie Baldwin, the old woman whose remains had been found dashed to pieces on the rocks below, had been seen ascending this path from Ottermouth, and she had gone with the avowed intention of watching the doings of the lugger and its crew. She recognized, in the vessel approaching, one in which her only son had been inveigled to his ruin some months before, and she had been heard to utter awful denunciations against the owner of it. As long as they had escaped detection Nellie had said nothing, but the unfortunate lad had been taken in an affray on the Sussex coast, tried, and transported; and now she avowed her determination of finding some of them out, and giving information. She suspected the young Chetwynds of connivance, and

felt that a handsome bribe would be offered her for silence, if she could only confront one of them.

She had left the old crone with whom she lived exultant and defiant, and in two hours afterwards she was found a corpse, mutilated, and only recognizable by her dress! During the church-service, meanwhile, the lugger had been seen to "lie-to," and send a boat on shore; and the boat had put off again after a short time. At that hour it was low water, and the sands were bare, at least that narrow slip between the broken rocks below the cliffs and the sea, which was always covered at high tide. The little craft was but a speck in the offing when the turmoil, consequent on the discovery of the body, subsided sufficiently to allow the more rational to connect her visit with the old woman's death. Then she was running before the wind, straight out to sea, and no one could guess her destination. Some said she was a strange craft, managed by men who knew the locality, and "the murderer" had, doubtless, effected his escape on board of her; but it was evident Nellie Baldwin knew her and her business too; and it was suspected that, but for the freemasonry among the reputed fisher-

men at Ottermouth, which kept every lip sealed as usual, a definite clue might have been obtained to the delinquent crew, evidently accomplices, if nothing worse. As it was, nothing more could be traced. Large rewards were offered for evidence leading to the conviction of any one concerned, and a special reward of two hundred pounds for the apprehension of Charles Chetwynd.

It would be vain to describe the effect of this event on Lady Agnes. Brave and enduring in her griefs, this was one which, in its nature, seemed to offer no ray of comfort; for, although she continued to utter the words "He never did it"—"My boy never did it," still there was the slur on his name—the presumed guilt, which his absence encouraged. She had lost her son, and it was not one of those bereavements which still leave consolation and hope behind,—that hand which, pointing upwards, seems to say, that in "going before" her, there would be a more familiar welcome for her when her time came to follow. Where was he gone now? Where was her son? Dear even with the stigma of an old woman's blood on his hands; for, if guilty, which she could not believe, he might repent; dear, dearer far than ever to her, because it is tribula-

tion, such as this, which tests the strength of our love, the worth of our steadfastness.

The old father sat brooding by the side of Robert's bed, watching the phases of the strange illness which afflicted his unconscious son, and which Dr. Laidman could not make out, brooding over the stain on his family name,—now and then catching incoherent words in the strange disjointed ravings which interrupted the patient's fitful slumbers.

In his calm moments he declared that he had never seen his brother since the hour when on Saturday night he had lighted his candle and bid him "good night."

One of the most bitter drops in the cup of the unhappy mother was the fact that her husband, instead of supporting her, and consoling her, in her affliction, upbraided her for her partiality,—taunted her with the end of her favourite, and in some way made her out to blame. She scarcely dared to enter Robert's room, lest she should be subjected to these cruel taunts before him. Mr. Vincent, the rector, paid periodical visits, but though a good man, his peculiar phraseology failed in its aim to carry comfort to her. Both trusting in the one fundamental truth, he could

not touch her heart; she could not unburden herself to him; she winced under the lash of his tongue; he evidently excluding both Charlie and herself from "the elect," and considering his disgrace and her humiliation as the means used by Heaven to bring her to a sense of her sins. In her closet she received that strength man could not give, from One more merciful than the erring fellow-sinner who tried to crush her into "conversion,"—tried to wring from her honest lips those hackneyed words which, in the eyes of some well-meaning bigots, are the "open sesame" to the gates of heaven. Between the Vicar and Mr. Chetwynd there was more *rapproch*; they sighed with holy emotion over the sins of every one, including the missing "miscreant," and knelt to thank God that they were not as other men were. It is painful to dwell on these things, and we are told often that "novels should not be interlarded with religious opinions," but how is it possible to write true pictures of human events, of human passions, human crimes, if we lose sight of what is, or ought to be, the governing power of our lives? Mr. Chetwynd was avowedly, in a boastfully humble way, and in his own words, a "brand plucked from the burning;" but when the hour

came to test his faith, he proved himself no more then than he had been in the daily routine of his life, a true disciple of the meek and lowly Master he professed to serve. Ah me! who can tell? There are mysteries none of us here can solve, but it seems to me, judging by that test left us, which no man can dare to gainsay, that the true saint was to be found in his meek and gentle wife, whose unostentatious piety shrunk from the words, she too well knew were often empty sounds, or worse!

There had of course been an inquest adjourned from day to day, awaiting further proofs; awaiting the "apprehension of the culprit,"—and this was but a refinement of cruelty to the afflicted relatives (for all, even Giles, felt the sting of their disgrace). At length, when nothing more could be done, they brought in a verdict of "wilful murder against Charles Chetwynd."

That day, the suspense being over, Giles, who had never been sober since the blow had fallen on them, went into the study, and there found his father speechless, paralysed!

CHAPTER VIII.

"NOT GUILTY."—BURNT PROOFS.

Yes, paralysed! Lady Agnes, when summoned from Robert's room, could only confirm Giles's hurried conclusion, and when Doctor Laidman arrived he left the question beyond doubt. It was a "stroke," and he had not foreseen it, at least had not been certain of it. When Mr. Laidman had been "breaking" the murder to his old patient, you may recollect the professional speculations in which he mentally indulged when calculating the chances of the effect of the shock on a man of his years and temperament. He was glad to think "a stroke" had been one of the chances (he, of course, called it paralysis), but he had given the odds against such a probability,

—he had given it as his opinion (to himself) that the old man would "break up" in some other way. He had been too sanguine as to the effect of his skilful tinkering and patching up of the old craft which in early days had been so shattered by dissipation. For more than twenty years he had been doing it well;—yes, it was that; and Mr. Laidman rejoiced again to himself. It was early dissipation; he had not given sufficient weight to this obscure feature of the case. His "diagnosis" had been almost correct. But while this was passing within that massive cranium (even Mrs. Laidman never heard him express it), the excellent man was doing his best to "tinker up the old craft" as long as he could keep it afloat. "Giles the second would scarce be an improvement on Giles the first." This he did say to more than one confidential friend, who agreed with him. Mr. Chetwynd was an old man, he said (to the family), and although he might have lived for years longer without "exciting causes," this sudden shock, and the "tension" of the last week or so, had been too much for him. He might rally, but would never be the same man again; and here his "diagnosis" was unquestionably correct.

Robert was a secondary consideration now, and, left to himself for hours together, he seemed to recover nerve and tone gradually. He managed to get up after a time, and, looking more like a ministering corpse than a living man, he contrived to take his turn by his father's side, and relieve his mother of a portion of her fatigue. Gradually, as consciousness returned, the old gentleman showed his satisfaction at this, and never seemed at rest when he was out of his sight. Giles, who, at best, was a sorry nurse, felt injured by this partiality, and shrinking, as even Giles must have shrunk, from the sight of the neighbourhood, he went off under the pretext of looking out for a home for them abroad.

It was evident that the whole family must leave Chetwynd Park; they only waited until Mr. Chetwynd was sufficiently recovered, to migrate and hide their humiliation among strangers. The two daughters, Blanche and Agnes, were at Ryde—Giles away, and Lady Agnes and Robert absorbed with the afflicted man, so that they had no time to feel the awkwardness of their position in the county. Although a leading man in the neighbourhood, Mr. Chetwynd was far from popular; Lady Agnes, though respected by all, had

encouraged few intimacies, and now those who felt most commiseration for her felt too that they were not warranted in intruding on a grief so delicate and so intensely painful. Mrs. Vincent, a timid little woman, came and meant to be kind, but she “talked Vincent” to her, and so tearfully and simply took it for granted that as yet her “poor friend” was an “unreclaimed soul,” which Vincent hoped this “awful example” would bring into the fold, through prayer, that she was not encouraged to renew her feeble efforts to assist in this “joyful work.” Poor little soul! she sincerely believed in her “mission.” Alas! she also “sincerely believed” that Lady Agnes had a heart “dead, stony,” and “unable to appreciate precious truths,” and these good, simple-hearted people earnestly prayed that she might “feel the conviction of her sin!” It is thus that a spurious, artificial wordiness takes often the place of those sublime and unspeakable truths, the only safe and sure comfort in the hour of our deepest tribulation!

In her closet, with her Bible in her hands, the sorely-tried woman found that true consolation for which her heart yearned. There, before His throne she laid her dear son’s cause, and pleaded

for help—help for him, help for herself, to bear all—all that was in store for her! How could she tell when or how that terrible mystery would end, the beginning only of which had prostrated them all? Any hour might bring more fatal news—an arrest, and a trial.

About a month had passed since the affair on the Cliff, and a secluded village in the Isle of Wight had been selected as their first resting-place, when a letter in a coarse envelope, and directed in a feigned hand, reached Lady Agnes. The postmark was that of a southern Irish post, yet a glance told her who it was from, and almost paralysed her for the moment. But she had sufficient presence of mind to put the letter quietly in her pocket until she could get to her own room, where, after locking the door, she broke the seal. She felt like one in a trance, yet with some perceptions preternaturally quickened, her instinct told her that letter might contain something not safe to read in the presence of any one, lest her calmness should forsake her, and she might unwittingly betray its contents.

On her knees, in the same spot and in the same posture in which for weeks she had opened her

heart to God—praying the while that she might be supported to bear *the worst* that letter could tell her, she broke the seal and read its contents.

“My ever dearest mother,—To-morrow I shall once more be on the high seas, and beyond the reach of “justice.” Oh, what a mockery that word seems to be now! As a large reward is offered for me, I must be cautious, though I am among true men who know my innocence. Mother, my own darling mother, by all the love you ever bore me, believe that I am innocent of the foul crime attributed to me. I wish now I had never left home, and had left ‘every back to bear its own burden,’—but it’s done now, and I cannot undo it, I had no time to think—I *saw it all*, and if I return, I must, to clear myself, give evidence against those who did it, as I firmly believe, by accident; and I would rather fling myself over that cliff than tell what I know, and risk another life to save my own. But, dearest mother, although I am innocent of all guilt on that day, except the disobedience and disrespect to my father, which has brought on me this heavy punishment, and for which tell him I crave his forgiveness, still I could not by any confession

of mine wipe out the stain from the name of Chetwynd. Mother, dearest, you do not know how my heart is torn. A hundred times I have been on the point of delivering myself up and coming home, but for one reason, and that in time you may know. How can I tell you *all* I have still to tell? I shall not suffer alone, for Edith Douglas, of whom you heard me speak, is *my wife*. It is true, I assure you, though it was a mad foolish step for us to take; but we were married privately in London before witnesses on the —. The fact is, we were afraid to trust to chance, and what her father might make her do—and this he cannot *undo*—for her sake now it might be better if he could! We intended to tell you all as soon as I got my commission, and we hoped that her father and mine would forgive what they could not prevent. Dearest mother, she is a *darling*, as good as she is beautiful, and I can trust you to be a mother to her, as she has none of her own, which may be the reason why we were both so rash and imprudent. I have the certificates, and will never part with them, but I send you copies enclosed; and if there should be any *results*, you will take care of all for me until I claim them, which with God's help

I shall do some day. One honest word would set me free, but it has not been spoken yet, or I should have seen it in the papers,—I won't speak first. Mother, I charge you to love Edith for my sake, and for all that she must suffer on my account; for, you see, if I came back now, it might be said it was this motive prompted me. I know that with you I shall be as dear, if not dearer, than ever, for you never would forsake any one in the hour of adversity, even when their own folly has brought it on them. I entreat you to do nothing to clear me to the public; *you can do nothing without making matters worse for all*. Tell my father I conjure him to forgive me and to recall his curse,—the last words I heard him utter. If I have done foolishly, I have meant for the best. May God bless and support you, and make me more worthy of you.

"Your loving son,

"CHARLIE."

"One who saw *it* as well as I did, lent me some tin, so I'm not at all hard up."

Poor Charlie's literary powers were not great, for want of use. Enclosed was a copy of a cer-

tificate of marriage—names, places, and dates, Mr. Douglas's address, and some other guarded memoranda.

How long Lady Agnes remained in the same position she could not tell, for her door had been assailed by knocks, and she heard them not,—she was overwhelmed.

Not guilty! She felt that her heart had not deceived her, when it told her from the first that her boy had never done so foul a deed. Yet that there was a dark mystery—something more to be told—was but too evident, or he would never have gone away. Why sacrifice himself, and at such a time? Why cast reproach on them all, rather than bear witness against the true criminal? And then his extraordinary marriage, which, in its relative position to the murder, was reduced to a secondary position! How was it all to be cleared up and the rash girl exonerated?

Down still on her knees, with the letter crushed in her hands, she could but cry out—

“God help, support, guide me! God shield, guide, and support my poor son!”

As she raised her streaming eyes to heaven, his portrait seemed to smile down on her in un-

conscious beauty, and this increased her conflicting emotions, for it was difficult to ascribe predominance to any one of the many feelings in the tumult which surged within her.

Another knocking at length roused her, and Robert entered her room, even more ghastly than usual.

"Mother, what is it? what fresh sorrow?"

"Not sorrow, but joy, my son. I must tell your father, only let me get calm."

"Is it from him?"

"Yes, and he is innocent! He saw it all, and he has gone rather than bear witness against the true criminal, though he says it was not so much murder as accident. But why sacrifice us all, himself included, for any one?"

"It requires your faith to take it in; do you believe it?"

"As I hope for heaven, I do!"

"Let me see the letter"—and he held out an eager, trembling hand for it.

"Not before your father sees it. I must take it to him; then, if you like, I will tell you its contents, for it will comfort us all."

Then she rose, composed her features, and went down to her husband's room.

Mr. Chetwynd was improving to a certain extent; his speech was still thick and laboured, but he could now make himself understood; his mind, though weakened, was clear. She knew that the repentance of his son would gratify him, and his assertion of innocence too, however mysteriously qualified. She knew enough of the Douglas *ménage* to be certain of money on Edith's side, and she calculated upon it to heal all wounds that step might inflict on his mind. So she prepared him by degrees; and then, after telling him the facts, gave him the letter to read. There was no wish expressed for secrecy; the letter was evidently written for his father's perusal; but she never intended to do more than read portions of it to the sons. Edith's feelings must be thought of,—she must be acknowledged before they could be entrusted with her secret,—but fate, nay, Providence, ordained otherwise.

“I must see to it at once! We must call a meeting of magistrates; send for the coroner; send, too, for the inspector of police. Foolish boy, to go off with this mad idea! We will find the miscreant and hang him; and when Charles sees that in the papers he will come home again; he will not be called on then to assist in the con-

viction. He must have lost his head! Some of those smuggling rascals have got hold of him, and have perhaps worked on his feelings; he was never very wise,—takes after you, Agnes, in everything."

He was speaking rapidly, almost unintelligibly, but very loud for him now. Did it attract Robert, who certainly seemed possessed by a wandering spirit that day? for he now suddenly entered the room, although he knew his mother wished to be left alone with his father.

"Robert, here is work for you, my boy! See to it at once! Write and ask Lord Chepstow to come here to-morrow, and ask the Vicar and Miles to meet him; they will sift it. They will hunt out the renegade hound and gibbet him—hanging is too good for the wretch! Read that, and tell me what you make of it. You have a clearer head than mine, and there is something I cannot make out in it."

Robert took the letter, but his mother interposed.

"Is it fair to Edith?"

"Let him read it; he is worthy of my perfect confidence," and looking tenderly at him, "Prop of my old age."

No one dared to contradict, and, to say the truth, Robert gave no time for it. He seized and read the letter eagerly through, his face blanching as he went on. His mother watched him, and a feeling, not of pleasure, chilled her heart, as she saw the expression of his face.

"What do you think of it? Quite satisfactory it seems on his own account, but I don't make it out."

"Think of it? That it is worthy of himself; in perfect keeping with everything he does—rash, mad, never looking an inch before his nose. That letter would hang or compromise a dozen innocent men, and not clear him, and he is not expected to criminate himself. You surely will think, Sir, before the contents of that insane production go beyond this room?"

"I don't see it in that light, Robert," mildly suggested the mother.

"I dare say *you* do not. It is not likely, but you must allow me, a man, Mother, to know something more of these things. My father has asked my opinion, and I give it. Charles has placed himself in a suspicious position, and brought us all to shame, and I don't see why, to clear himself to you, the only one likely to swal-

low such stuff, he is to compromise every one else with his confounded mooning."

"You may be right, Robert. I never saw it in that light. I think we will consider about it. Ask Vincent to come up, we need not mind him, you know," said Mr. Chetwynd.

"Give me my letter, Robert."

But Robert stood twirling the letter in his hands, as if he did not hear her; he was planted on the rug, with his back to the fire, staring with fierce concentrated gaze over their heads, and out beyond, as if making up his mind to some decisive step.

"Give me my letter, Robert, I want it."

But Robert seemed not to hear. Lady Agnes was, as I think I before told you, far from sharp-sighted, either as concerned the mere use of her visual organs, or that quickness of apprehension in connection with it which gives such power to its possessor—a power which turns the scale in many a crisis when fate hangs on the decision of a second; she saw something in Robert's manner which cast a cold shudder over her, but when he did not reply, and seemed lost in thought, she waited patiently until she could recall his attention. Seconds passed into minutes. The clock

behind Robert's head ticked audibly, and then chimed the quarter, as he stood on the rug, and stared out beyond the terrace and across the distant hills, apparently seeing or hearing no one. A sudden snort from the invalid showed that he had dropped off again into his usual torpor, oblivious alike of joy or sorrow. She looked on him as he lay there, poor man, his face drawn aside, the helpless wreck of the tyrant of her life. A thousand sad and anxious thoughts, recollections of the past, responsibilities for the future, came rushing over her;—her eyes had wandered from Robert to his father, and when the latter turned round and appeared to be arranging the fire, she took little heed of what seemed to be a commonplace act, one he rather piqued himself on doing well. A sudden blaze, such as paper causes when it ignites from slumbering embers, recalled her attention involuntarily. She saw it, yet some seconds elapsed before the cause once occurred to her, then it seemed incredible.

“Robert, what is that?” And she started to her feet, white as chalk, and trembling in every limb—trembling until she could not advance a step even towards the fireplace, where the charred outline of the paper still fluttered in the draught.

His hands were empty, her letter gone. She sank down in her chair.

"Robert, Robert! what have you done.?"

"What every man but a fool must have done; burned the infernal firebrand, *that* can hang no one now," and he laughed a diabolical low chuckle. Then raising his voice, as if to brow-beat and terrify her, he said, "Mother, you don't understand these things. I could not allow such a document to exist in the house an hour. I have thought it out. Poor Charlie may not have done it, but he might have said so without throwing out his infernal hints. What if servants or strangers heard even a rumour of what he has been such a fool as to put in black and white? He must needs go and leave that confounded glass there to identify him; he must rush off like a madman, and attract suspicion, and when he has raised the country by his confounded blundering folly, he saves his own neck and writes what is calculated to endanger half-a-dozen others. Why did he not come and tell what he saw, like a man? But he never could do wrong in your eyes."

Robert was gesticulating violently, walking up and down the room in great excitement, and he

took little pains to restrain either his voice or his actions.

"Robert! Robert!" and the anguish of the tones no one could describe.

"For God's sake, mother, hold your tongue about that letter, unless you wish to implicate Giles and me! We have had enough of it already. The miserable old carcass was not worth the row; I should like to know who would take the trouble to do it. Confounded fool!"

Her eye was fixed on him, but he tried to evade it. Once only he seemed as if constrained to meet her glance. It was but for a second, and he shrank from her eyes; but each knew the other's feelings without the need of words.

"May God forgive you, Robert, and teach me to do so; nothing is impossible with Him."

The old father was asleep, muttering "Very right," "very desirable," "'strodinary intelligence," "meeting," "magistrates," etc. etc.

From that day forth there was an impalpable barrier between Robert and his mother, which nothing could remove.

* * * *

Who was the monster? Who, if it was only an "accident," concealed his share of it, and

allowed the pride of her home to be deemed guilty ; her son to be made an outcast and a wanderer ? " Who did it ? " a spiteful fiend kept whispering night after night, and day after day as she pondered on her loss or dreamed of it,—and then a horror would creep over her, as certain fancies would send an icy chill to her heart.

" Thank God, one of my sons was never out of my sight, and the other ill in bed, too ill to be out ; and there could be no motive for any one—oh, no, no, no, no ! "

CHAPTER IX.

THE STORM BURSTS.—AN OUTRAGED PARENT.

A NEW phase of life was opening before Lady Agnes Chetwynd,—a phase of personal responsibility, a position new and trying to her after twenty-five years of stagnation, during which it had become natural to her to hear her judgment ridiculed or condemned, and her intellect depreciated. The dominant spirit which had carried every point was a wreck, falling asleep with the placidity of second childhood while questions touching the lives and reputations of his family were being discussed before him,—a few minutes, too, after the vehement excitement in which all his old energy had flickered up for the moment, and had seemed likely for once to be exercised

to some good purpose. That sudden little snore, breaking as it did on the silence of the scene while Robert had been planning his treachery, and his mother waiting his attention, served as with an electric touch to open her eyes to her true position. Hers for the future must be the guiding spirit, if the family was to hold together, and its dignity be supported. Giles was—not there—where, she scarcely knew, except that he had “gone abroad.” “Poor Giles!” was all that she could say mentally, and with this ejaculation he—the heir—was dismissed; and Robert? the one head among them; but Robert must be *kept down*. A firm hand and a determined will, or Robert Chetwynd would be the ruling power,—subtle, wary, selfish, and, as she had now fatal evidence, unprincipled as to ways when he had an end before him.

After the scene below she had retired to her room, and it required the palpable evidence of her sight to convince her that only a few hours had passed since the morning when, before receiving his letter, she had prayed for her boy. A thousand nameless trifles bore mute evidence of the fact,—her books with their marks, her cushions as she had left them, the very glass of water she

had filled and left on her reading table,—all told of her recent presence. Yet she had lived through a life of joy, sorrow, disappointment, and *trouble*,—trouble and anxiety of a vague and complex nature,—in those brief hours. And now the future,—a future in which she was to take a momentous step alone, promptly, and with consequences likely to affect them all for years to come. She saw that if she were to act, it must be on her own responsibility, and she must either tell her husband or conceal things from him, as his health permitted. On one thing she was determined. Robert should have no share in her councils.

She sat and pondered over all, and very bitter indeed was the result of her reflections. But she must act.

Fortunately the certificate, or rather copy, was still safe, and the sheet upon which the names and addresses of some of the witnesses were given; these she secured, and then she sat down to write from recollection the substance of Charlie's letter. To this she added a memorandum of the circumstances under which she had lost his letter; she tied and sealed up these documents, and put them away in her *escritoire*, and then sat down to the most delicate task of

writing to Edith. It did not require a moment's consideration to determine what was her best course,—her home, her arms, her motherhood were Edith's best refuge, and to tell her this cost no effort. It was to convey to her her deep sympathy, to tell her how she deplored her position without blaming her or him, to comfort and reassure the poor, miserable young wife, without a single reflection, which made that letter so hard to write; but it was written, and where a pure, loving heart guides the pen it must be eloquent, far more so than any elaborate phraseology can make it. "Come to me, my own dear Charlie's wife, and be my own daughter."—And she wrote to Mr. Douglas. This was a harder letter to compose, since she was the mother of a fugitive from the law claiming his child,—his heiress for the outlaw. But this letter, too, was worthy of the head and heart of the writer. A subtle tact told her that his was a sordid nature, to be approached but by gold. She told him of her own separate wealth, and of her intention of giving it up to her son, so that his daughter should not come to a penniless husband, but alas, she did not realize the world's estimate of that son's position now! It never

occurred to her in its full significance that, in asking him to allow his daughter at once to assume the name of Chetwynd, she was inviting her to infamy and disgrace, which wealth and position only made more prominent. She little realized the overwhelming blow that stubborn Scottish heart would receive when in one day he was to discover his daughter's treachery and marriage, and the irretrievable disgrace of her husband. Charlie said he was innocent, and to the loyal heart of his mother this was enough. It requires *love* to strengthen faith; where love exists, faith is strong always,—but what signified this to an incensed father? Lady Agnes was destined to receive the most humiliating and withering rebuff she had ever been offered in her life through the medium of her cherished, her favourite son. All the snubs which that purse-proud *nouveau riche* had received from the *sangre azul* upon whose preserves he had intruded, were carefully treasured up, and had rankled in his heart; now he had an earl's daughter, the wife of an old county magnate at his discretion, and it was not in the character of Angus Douglas not to make reprisals when he could. His was not the delicate mind which sees,

in an insult offered to a woman, a missile which, glancing off from the impervious shield of her own dignity, recoils on the assailant and covers him with the infamy he would fain have attached to his victim. He was not sensible of his own shame when he wrote his reply. His daughter was his one child, loved after his fashion, and with a selfish view to his own aggrandizement, for her he hoped to win a tie to connect him with those "bloated aristocrats" with whom it had been the chief aim of his life to stand, as he put it, "cheek by jowl,"—"as good as they;" and now he found that, unknown to him, she was the wife of one of these very aristocrats,—but a reputed *murderer*, a man whose very connection and name would make the disgrace more indelible!

But it should not be; she should not bear his name; he would not acknowledge the tie. The girl had been tampered with,—her youth imposed on by a designing miscreant to get her money. Then it was not a valid marriage; he knew he should find a hitch, he would *make* a hitch; he would deny the whole story, until the villain dared to come forward and claim her,—and the *gallows together*. His money was not going to support "a murderer" in exile; he was not going

to help "a murderer" to evade the law. The word "murderer" had a strange fascination for this irate Anglo-Scot, now balked of all the grand display which he had a thousand times pictured to himself,—the pageant on the coming day when Edith should marry a lord. A thousand times he had debated on the relative advantages of St. George's, Hanover Square, and an open-air wedding in the presence of an admiring tenantry, surrounded by heather-clad hills, amidst the exquisite scenery of his own glen; both pageants were now expunged, as with an enchant-er's wand, from the probabilities of his imaginary future; and "a loon with an auld wife's bluid on his hands would heir his lands and spend his siller,—*if he could get it; ay, if he could!*—but Angus Douglas is no that fule to let him." And the thought of his daughter disinherited, and his lands in stranger hands, crossed him again. "He sal no have my lass, if I kill her first! — she sal heir them her ain sel' as a Douglas."

And all this time none but the heather-clad hills, the gushing, sparkling streams, or his own little den, in which Angus took comfort in strong punch, were the depositories of his hated secret;

his daughter was ill,—too ill to talk ; his guests shot ; and the duenna who presided over his child's welfare made love to him.

Angus was "awfu' canny." He soon sifted Mrs. Downie, unsuspected by that lively dame, and found out how little, fortunately for him, she knew of Edith's doings. For a whole week he made solemn love to her, and discussed Charles Chetwynd's affair "whiles," by way of digression. She said all that was correct and proper about such an act ; condoled with Lord Avon on his misplaced favour, said she was glad matters had not gone further with Edith, and considered Charlie Scampington's affair a fortunate interlude at the time. Somehow, just before the proposal ought to have come to her, however, the wily lover took a "huff," the ostensible cause, something as distinct from Edith as possible. Scarcely knowing how it all came about, the good lady found herself one grey morning, with a good large cheque in her pocket, but in a second-class carriage on the Caledonian Railway, bearing with her those charms, and propensity to intrigue to more propitious scenes, which she had exercised so fruitlessly at Inchnagnisack. Could she have heard Angus cursing her as he slowly ladled

his steaming glenlivat from his tumbler—cursing her for her neglect of duty, for letting his pearl slip through her fingers into a “swine’s snout,” her outraged vanity would scarcely have been appeased, but she would have been wonderfully enlightened on a subject she had not deemed worthy of her notice when she was responsible for its consequences.

* * * * *

What about Edith? How did she bear the blow which had fallen most fatally on her?

Inchnaguisack was perhaps one of the most exquisite of the many fairy glens to be met with in the Highlands of Scotland.

A sparkling burn, tossing and tumbling over rocks, down a cleft in the hill-side, through which it found its way to one of the great lochs, fringed with larch, birch, and black pine. This burn passed close to the house, which was one of those fine stone mansions so common now in Scotland, where the quarry is generally the future cellar. From the terraced gardens which overhung the burn and its picturesque waterfall, from every window of the house, scenery no English eye can imagine met the view, hill upon hill, waving with larch, rock upon rock, scaur-

cut, and contrasting their white chasms against the pine-clad slopes, then purple heather-tinted hills, and the sharp, clear outlines of mountain-ranges in the distance, raising their peaks against the clear blue sky one hour, and then veiling them in mist, through which the sun's rays shone, and added a thousand mystic beauties to the scene. Then again, draped in leaden tints, the traveller could scarcely recognize the *riant* landscape of a brighter day; the loch, now molten silver, now shimmering crystal, now brown, murky, and dark, as the landscape above shed its reflection on its bosom.

On this ever-varying scene Edith loved to gaze alone; she loved to lie and think of her husband, of a future to reach which she had, she knew, a terrible gulf to pass,—a future which could not be postponed—a future marching on to her with gigantic strides, as the shadows of the fleeting clouds seemed to advance across that shining, shimmering loch below, turning golden sunshine to inky shadows before she had time to realize their approach. There was little *rappor*t between Mrs. Downie and herself, each had her own secrets apart from the other, each considered the other in her way, each pleased herself in her

method of passing her time. An observer might have noticed the marvellous change a few short months had made in Edith,—listless and indifferent, she shunned now the society her father assembled in his house. There was no piquant smile, no gay repartee, as of old; she sat at meals and was civil to people, and then relapsed into herself.

She was no reader, but a few of Byron's works, one or two novels with scenes of secret thrilling romance, found favour in her sight, and she sat and read on the rocks, and her thoughts wandered to Charlie—sometimes a newspaper received her passing notice, the 'Gazette' being the point of attraction.

One day Mrs. Downie had gone off on an expedition of her own, when Edith took up the 'Times,' and listlessly read it here and there. She was curled up on the sofa, looking pale and ill,—Edith often felt ill these times, and said nothing,—there was a great terror at her heart always, a something not to be hidden much longer, and once alone she was glad to give way; she was lying down then, or rather curled up, all her forced spirits gone, and her eye travelling in search of the 'Gazette,' but larger letters at-

tracted her attention. Large "agony" headings and sensation paragraphs of murder,—another day, and no murderous recital would have found interest in her sight, but it was raining and she had nothing to do but think, so her eye rested idly on the fatal words once more—words which contained her doom; words more sudden and irretrievable in their effects on her bright young spirit than those leaden shadows on the aspect of the loch below, she had so often watched before, now dull and grey and pale,—words printed for unnumbered millions to read, but which had a meaning for her alone—words which spoke in a cypher the key of which she alone held. It told her not of the gulf that she must cross to reach a sunny future, from which she had timidly shrank in silly cowardice, but of an abyss over the brink of which she was suspended, and out of which no human hand could rescue her. He was gone, none knew whither, with a price on his head, and she, his wife, left with the irrepressible evidences of their union struggling to light! Some things stun us—some things come on us and paralyse our faculties,—and yet deny us the relief of insensibility. The thing was all there before her in its hideous details—she never asked her-

self if he did it; he was *gone*, and she was *left*. Could he have come to her? Might he be out on the hills now, out in some of the caves where the Covenanters had hidden themselves in olden times, where the followers of the Stewarts, the cavaliers concealed themselves after Culloden until death or escape released them? She knew the caves well, she had told him of them too. Could he have remembered them? Could he have found his way to her? It was a fitful deceptive gleam which shimmered over the black pool beneath her feet for the moment, but it kept her from despair. Her dilated eyes now seemed to wink as she stared out across the loch and the mountains beyond, and planned, after the manner of a story she had read, how she might feed and visit and conceal him, and how long it might last,—only for one thing, the thing that was coming, and could not be put off; still, if he did find his way north, if only once she could see him again, murderer or not, she cared little, she would go off with him and never leave him more. Over all this plan, through all these hopes and fears, one dominant habit reigned supreme, the habit, the necessity of concealment. “Oh if I had only told papa, and had it all over at first! and now

I dare not! It must come out somehow, but I can never tell myself." She gathered up the paper, then she put it down lest it might be missed, for conscience is a great coward; and then she went upstairs very quietly and went to bed. She looked once in the glass, and her face frightened her; no one must see that face until it was right again; if they would only let her be, and not bother her. If they would not send for a doctor; that was her horror.

Charlie used to write to her under cover to "nurse," the old woman who had presided over her toilet from her birth to the present moment. Only two days before that dreadful newspaper paragraph, he had written to tell her he was to get his commission soon, and in a mounted regiment. He would write, he must write again wherever he had gone! but day after day passed and no letter came, and Edith found it would not be safe to lie in bed any longer, a doctor would be sent for. So, she got up, and with a herculean effort satisfied her father that she was better. Nurse was an oracle in that house, and she said it was "nothing ailed the darling." Nurse suspected she had left a sweetheart in London, and made a shrewd guess as to the person, but

the old woman little knew the part she had played in a certain little affair in London to be hereafter explained.

Up to the caves was Edith's first ramble, though with flagging step. There was one in which an illicit still had long flourished; there was a chimney cut in the rock, and a place where a bed of heather could be made,—she saw and planned it all. Here she could hide him, if he would only come. Here she would live with him, and let her father find it out as he could. Her busy brain was full, poor child, of romance, surreptitiously acquired at school in lieu of drier studies. Her spirits actually rose to the occasion. She seemed gayer, even if her gaiety was forced, than she been for some time before; and then, as day had after day came and went, and no letter found its way to her, her spirits sank again, and she lived under a horror no pen could describe.

At length the blow came. One letter from Ireland—through nurse—preparing her for the climax—saying all that could be said to comfort her under such circumstances, commending her to his mother. There was another to Mr. Douglas from Charlie; and it was this which gave the first intimation to the deceived father of

the deception which had been practised on him. It was well that the outraged man did not read the effusion as usual before the assembled company. He had gone to the moors very early that day, and his letters were not opened until he had retired to the seclusion of that room, sacred to the enjoyment of whisky punch and farm accounts. Edith had taken to her bed again the day before. "One of her headaches," she said, but it was after Charlie's letter; and, in the extremity of her cowardice and woe, she had entrenched herself in this fortress. Her father might be more merciful—he might spare her more, if she were ill—if he thought she might die; and here she remained to await her fate.

In his letter to Mr. Douglas Charlie said:—

"I have waited to claim my wife at your hands until I could do so in a profession in which princes are proud to serve. If I am a second son, I hope my father will do something for me, for us; and for the rest, our name is one fit to claim a place with any in Britain. A circumstance of which I was an accidental and unseen witness obliges me to leave England, although I pledge you the unsullied word of a gentleman, I had no hand in it. I would ask you to put faith in me, and believe

my innocence, on my simple assertion, had I not merited your anger by marrying your daughter privately. I may say it was as much from a foolish temerity and love of adventure, as from any other circumstance, that we took that step ; but I leave her to plead my cause, and entreat you to bear patiently this dreadful annoyance I have caused you for the time. I must plead for her, and entreat of you to be gentle to her, and unite with my dear mother, Lady Agnes Chetwynd, in protecting her from the world's blame until I can claim her at your hands. The thing cannot be undone now—for her sake forgive us both."

It was a pretty cool letter under the circumstances, one which no guilty man could have written ; it was its unconscious innocence, unconscious self-assertion, even when pleading for pardon, which would have convinced any man not blinded by passion and revenge. The copies of certificates, the dates, addresses, etc., were all there ; but Angus Douglas, the wary, canny Scot, who had worked his way from a poor man's estate to wealth, by a cool, calm head, was in one of those passions by which men of his stamp are seldom overtaken more than once or twice in their lives—a passion in its concentrated strength,

resembling the white heat of metal. He stood up. The family Bible was there—for Angus read his evening chapter, even when the appreciation of it was slightly clouded by the fumes of Glenlivat. He stood up, placed his right hand on the sacred text, and swore an oath with his eyes raised to heaven, which makes more easily roused mortals who effervesce in stormy words shiver in horror. He would cast her out dishonoured on the world, but the name of Chetwynd should never be borne by one of his blood; he would kick him; he would horsewhip him; he would hang him; he would drown him; he would swing for it himself, before Charles Chetwynd should ever see his child again;—yes, he would murder her first. His letter, the evidences of her marriage, every vestige that could serve to confirm it, he burned at once. He would punish her with dishonour—he would make her an open shame, rather than she should bear the name of a man stained with blood. He refused to think him innocent for a moment, for he had overreached him. Far on in the small hours of the morning, his gaunt figure, candle in hand, crept to his daughter's door. She had waited for him in long protracted agony of expectation until she believed

him in bed; then, exhausted nature had sunk into sleep—reprieved for another day, as she thought; but it was not so. He stood by her bedside, and contemplated her fresh, young beauty, still more touchingly lovely with the traces of suffering, subduing, and softening it, than in the exuberance of mere health and spirits, as he had seen her a few short weeks before. Her eyes were hollow now, with dark rims round them, but the silky fringes rested on her snowy cheek, just touched with the flush of sleep; her lips were parted, and the pearly teeth were seen; she almost smiled, as if her dreams were mercifully cheating her into some transient joy,—and, of this his child, his only one, he had been robbed!—robbed of all he most esteemed in her, her marketable value; he could no longer use her as his crowning glory; she could not give him the thing for which his soul thirsted! She lay there—the wife of a murderer—a man the world called a murderer—a man who was a fugitive from justice—a man with a price on his head—a man with a sullied name; his daughter, his heiress, the only one he had to inherit his wealth—his daughter, whom he had intended to make a peeress—his daughter, for whom he would

have refused ten thousand a year, unless it had been accompanied by a title.

He stood and looked on her, the one thing on earth he loved. Yet, as she lay there, it was as a rare gem, a bale of silks, a bundle of shawls—something very precious, measured by his standard; but still not as his child, not as a living sentient being—a creature born to feel, to think, to suffer—a being for whose happiness he was responsible. She was his property—his pearl, which had been sullied, and left worthless on his hands; a thing he was ashamed of; a thing he must keep still, and hide the blemishes, lest the world should find them out, and mock him!

Round her neck was a common india-rubber chain, frequently worn in those days; the end was concealed within her nightdress. Very gently, yet with burning eyes, he drew it forth; at the end was a plain gold ring—her wedding-ring. Gently as he had touched her, she felt it; instinctively she snatched at her treasure, and awoke. He stood there a gaunt accusing terror to her, for his face told her at once he knew all. She looked wildly at him, but she could not speak. It was come now, that scene she had cowered from, shrank from, and evaded so long.

The storm had burst on her ; she could flee no more. She sat up in bed, with her arms round her raised knees, and tried to look defiant, though the wild scared face she turned on him showed but too plainly her unutterable terror. He stood with the candle in his hand still raised above the level of his own eyes, so that it shone directly in hers ; but still no word had escaped him. Was he going to murder her ? She had heard of such things before ; he might mean it now ; only she wished he would speak to her—do something to break the awful spell. He was only gloating over her terror, enjoying with fiendish delight this first portion of the punishment he was beginning to inflict on her,—debating within himself what he should do next. There was a time when the “taws” would have come in handy, and his fingers itched for this ancient instrument of domestic punishment ; but Angus had sense enough through his rage to know it would not do now. She looked up at him, as if pleading for life, and yet her tongue refused its office ; she could not speak, but at length, as the ring dangled from her neck and touched her hand, she caught it, and toyed with it tenderly between her trembling fingers. It caught his eye, and

broke the spell. A red spot was burning on each cheek now, though his lips were white and compressed, his sandy hair erect and dishevelled, his eyes staring, and, I am sorry to say, a strong aroma of whisky pervading his person and breath.

“You will just gie me that ring.”

“Oh, father, spare me.”

“You’ll just gie me that ring, or do you wish me to take it?” And he put out his hand menacingly.

In an instant, with trembling fingers, she had loosed the chain.

“It is a real one, indeed it is, and it was all done right; no one can break it now; no one can take me from him. I’m his wife.”

“Yes, it’s gould, I’m no going to contradic that, and vera pretty no dout it is; but ye’re no going to wear it, a’ the same, lass. Look ye here.”

He put it on the hearthstone wheel-wise, and crushed it under his boot-heel until it broke in two; he took the pieces and snapped them again in his nervous fingers, and he trod on the pieces again, and ground them flat on the hearth with his iron-nailed heels. “Do you see your braw ring now, lass? Well, just as I have smashed that, I will break this grand marriage

you have been so awfu' canny about. Do you know I've burned your lines, lass? Sae no one can take ye from your husband! I'm thinking he's no that ready to come for his bride the nicht! When he comes to seek you, lass, he will have a word with me first. It's 'O'er the water and o'er the sea,' but it's no 'O'er the water to *Charlie*,' this time, I'm thinking. Eh! it's bonnie Prince Charlie, is it? Only Miss Flora Macdonald is na wi' him this time rowing o'er the Minch."

"Father, for God's sake, spare me! You cannot hide it; you cannot break it. I am ruined, disgraced, except as his wife; and I am proud of being that."

"Vera proud, nae dout. It's a gran match, my certie, with a gallows-bird. And Angus Douglas is that soft, he is going to thank Prince Charlie for the honour he has done his family, taking his daughter to a high place above the people when she goes to see him hang! It's an elevated poseetion, and I am a humble man. I am thinking I'm no that daft yet, lass. Who knows this thing here?"

"No one."

"Don't lie to me, or it will be worse for ye."

"No one knows it—no one suspects even, except that I like him."

"Not nurse?"

"No, no; no one knows a thing. But they must know soon; I cannot keep it much longer."

"Ay! and *that's it*, is it? Now, we'll just have it out the nicht, then, while they are all asleep. I've a mind to kick ye out o' my house the nicht, lass, and I'll no say but what I may do that same yet, if you force me to it." And he sat down, and took a knee in each palm of his hand, glaring at her the while.

"Now, you'll down on your marrow-bones, and swear that you'll never speak of that villain again."

"Oh, father—father! How can I? I've sworn at the altar already to obey him for ever; and when he comes for me, what will he say? His name is my name; I am Mrs. Chetwynd, indeed I am." And she tossed her little head proudly.

"Vera weel, it's no that wet outside. I'll no 'file my tongue by the name you ca' yourself by, but a wummun of that name never sleeps under a roof o' mine. If ye canna knuckle down, mayhap you'll dress yoursel' in your braws and go to your husband. I'm sorry I've spoilt the ring,

but I'm thinking there's one on the curtain in place of it. I'm no that sleepy but I can wait a wee, but the tane or the tither you do, lass,—take time to consider it."

"How can I hide my shame?" and the agony of her tone might have pierced even his heart.

"It's that the noo! That's the cry the noo! It's o'er late I'm thinking for talking of that the noo,—but leave that to me. You knuckle down on your marrow-bones, and swear you will give him up,—never dare say his name so much,—and I will no say but what I can contrive the rest. Your callant has none of Angus Douglas's siller yet, lass, so Angus has it to hide his shame wi'. Siller can do more nor you think. Many a lass has happened with a misfortune and is none the waur. I'll manage that when you obey me. I'm gain' sleepy the noo, lass,—ay or nay?"

Down on her knees, huddled on the floor, with streaming eyes, she crouched at her father's feet. "Hide my shame, hide my dishonour, and I will do all you ask."

"You swear it?"

"I do." And as she said it she hoped Charlie would come back and make her break this oath to her father, as he had made her break her

nuptial vow to him, her husband. She was a coward, physically and mentally, of the most abject class; it was constitutional, and she couldn't help it.

"Weel, we understand one another now, I'm thinking, and so I'll go to bed. You stay whar you are. I'll go bail you are no that frisky to be 'up in the morning early,'—specially as Johnny Cope's flitted awa' ye dinna ken whar."

And he was quite right there; the next day Edith was very ill. Even Mrs. Downie was anxious and puzzled, and nurse was woe-begone; she would have been more so, only she had a theory of her own about those letters. She believed that there was bad news about her sweetheart, and Edith was only fretting in consequence, but she thought, too, "it would all come right in time, so let her be, the lamb!"

Two days after came Lady Agnes's letters. The one to Edith, Mr. Douglas took the liberty of reading and destroying. After raving, as I have described, in fresh paroxysms of fury, he wrote his answer. Men of his temperament blaze up at the end, instead of at the beginning of an affair of the sort; but secrecy was his aim now, and he could only rave when secure from interruptions.

Even Edith he let alone, for he did not care to hasten a catastrophe which would have betrayed everything he was most anxious to hide; her health imperatively demanded quiet, so, in nurse's words, he "let her be."

He wrote at once to Lady Agnes. "Nothing will induce me to acknowledge the marriage of your son, a felon, with my daughter. Let him come and claim her, if he dare, and prove his marriage, and I will cut her off with a shilling. Until that day comes, it will be my business to hide the shame the miscreant has brought on my name. I may hide that, but to have her take the name of a murderer, a man who may yet be hanged, would disgrace her and me for ever before the whole world. She has sworn on her knees to give up all pretence to be his wife. If there is issue, you are welcome to that part of the business,—free to take it from the hour it breathes, as long as I never hear of or see it again. I don't believe in the marriage; it was a deception to get my money. When I have arranged my plans, I will write and tell you where I am going to take her,—till it's all over, you understand. Then, as my daughter, and with the money I have earned by honest industry,

I make no doubt we may find an honest husband whose hands are free from the stain of blood. Your son thought to get my money, yet he could not keep his hands clean; and now, before my money shall keep him in his concealment from justice, he must run his neck in the noose. Does he, do you, really think I can believe in the marriage? I have said it shall not be, and you won't come over me with any persuasions."

It was a rich treat to Angus Douglas to write thus to an earl's daughter, a "titled leddy," as he grimly called her as he gloated over the insolence with which circumstances gave him the power to address her. Angus could write a civil, nay, a gentlemanly letter, and his English in the ordinary intercourse of life was pure, with only sufficient accent to give raciness to his voice. He could *enact* the gentleman when it suited him; but, once roused, the dormant brutality of the man broke forth,—he revelled in his power of wounding, and, singularly enough, it became natural to him then to express himself in that dialect which has been made the medium of so much that is touching and exquisite in the productions of his national poets. Angus was a Scot by birth, but an Englishman by rearing, and the graft was no improvement on the original plant in his case.

CHAPTER X.

GONE TO "THE EAST."

VERY bitter were the tears shed by Lady Agnes over Mr. Douglas's heartless letter; her spirit, as a woman, rose at the outrage she could not but feel that he exulted in offering her in her distress. Women spurn men who forget their sex; but there was just that element of truth under it all which gave poignancy to his shafts. It was only too true that their name would bring no credit to Charlie's wife. He did not think it necessary to tell her that he had withheld her kind, motherly letter from Edith—(it was a consolation he felt the culprit did not deserve)—so the mother, and wife, were denied the mournful satisfaction of comforting each other, and each felt the other's apparent neglect.

There was no good in staying at Chetwynd Park. Lady Agnes had only waited to see if Edith was to come to her; as this comfort was denied her, there was nothing left but, with Robert's assistance, to remove her husband to Blackgang, Isle of Wight. The climate and the retirement were just the thing for them.

Giles still remained at Baden, but Robert was indefatigable in his attention to his father. There are people who are always "doing their duty" in an exemplary manner, and yet who can never inspire confidence. Robert Chetwynd was a model son now, giving unceasing attention to his father, and, to do him justice, always trying to please his mother,—trying to recover the place he saw he had lost in her regard; but it would not do. There was a tacitly-acknowledged estrangement between that mother and son which no duty on the one hand, or forbearance on the other, could remove. There was a fixed gulf between them nothing could bridge over. Of Edith and her affairs she told him nothing. It was a subject too cruelly painful to her for her to discuss it with Robert, after the fate of that letter at his hands, so he drew his own conclusions from her silence—" *There was a hitch somewhere.*"

At that time Giles was living, and Robert was the youngest son. It was a matter of no importance to him then, how, when, who, and where his brother had married. The fugitive brother no one mentioned now ; but the day came when these particulars were of vital importance to Robert Chetwynd, and he cursed his folly for not foreseeing all that was to occur.

The Douglas *ménage* was soon broken up in Scotland, his "little girl's" health being the ostensible reason. Mrs. Downie disposed of, as we have seen, the way was clear. Nurse, good, kind old nurse, who, except in her schooldays, had always been in attendance on her young lady, was to be left at home. She almost went on her knees to her master to be allowed to accompany her "lamb," but he was inexorable—he would have no spies. They were going to the East, he told her, to ride upon camels, and might be eaten up by lions before they returned ; but nurse would have cheerfully confronted the king of the forest to be near her child. Edith lay passive in her bed the greater part of her time. The weak character which had yielded to temptation and fear, now gave way completely under her father's menaces ; she believed he could annul

the marriage; she was passive in his hands, and she said, "Do as you will with me, only hide my shame, and give me the shelter of your roof." And to baffle the world, and to conquer the fate which the two fools had wellnigh consummated for him and for themselves, was just a work suited to the combative genius of Angus Douglas. They went to town in a day or two after Mrs. Downie's departure, and here he spoke much of camels, the Desert, Jerusalem, and Palmyra; his "child" was young, too young, for the dissipation of London life,—and delicate. He was going to ramble, he said; "cast a loose leg," and go hither and thither without a retinue, or the encumbrance of servants; and when his last acquaintance bade him farewell at Boulogne, and cast an inquiring glance at the pallid girl by his side, his world heard no more of Angus Douglas for months, when he turned up at Nice, and then at Cairo, and, as years went by, he and the girl were seen in various Mediterranean cities by English who had met them in that brief season in town. People wondered that she still remained unmarried.

That her son would return, and prove his claim to his wife, had been Lady Agnes's chief consol-

tion when the father had pronounced his will to be superior to the indissoluble tie. "The thing must lie fallow," she said, "until Charlie came back;" and then,—Oh! who can tell the tale of this fresh grief?

Once more the newspapers were full of agony paragraphs—paragraphs which brought consternation into many households, but in few with such bitter overwhelming effects as in hers. The steamer, a new one, in which Charlie had sailed, had been burned at sea! It was a long-protracted, agonizing uncertainty to that afflicted mother, before she arrived at the only possible conclusion to be reached—her son was lost now for ever. A list of passengers and men who had been saved were published, and as many of these men as could be seen, Robert saw and questioned. He was very good about it; showed the most brotherly interest in Charlie's fate,—but no man in any way resembling Charlie was among the survivors; though, under a feigned name, and among second-class passengers, a man answering his description was known to have been on board during the conflagration. So Edith, not yet a mother, was a widow before she was an acknowledged wife.

It was weeks and weeks after that before her grim father told her of her husband's fate. They were then in Normandy, shunning the tracks of their ubiquitous countrymen, until the time came when Edith, his "little girl," could resume her place among the maidens of her sphere. She was utterly broken down and passive now, and the news scarcely affected her as violently as he expected. She was stunned; nothing roused her from the torpor into which she had fallen. "Why cannot I die, as the cherished loved ones die? They have friends to grieve for them, but I cannot die; I must live to be punished for my folly—my sin!"

Mr. Douglas wrote to Lady Agnes then; he had taken high religious ground lately in the ultra-Presbyterian line. He told her that she ought to rejoice with him, and be thankful that he who was a thorn in the side of both families was plucked out from among them. He never could be a credit to them, and drowning was a less ignominious death than the one prepared for him, and which he would inevitably have suffered had he survived to be caught. He adduced one or two instances of executions which had taken place years after the crimes had been perpetrated; now, this contingency was impos-

sible, he felt more charitably disposed to the erring lad, he said. He then proposed that in January she should meet them at a small port in Normandy, if she could spare the time.

There are periods in our lives occasionally when, as to Job, every ill appears to overtake us at once, when we seem tried beyond our strength, when it appears that without dying we must be engulfed,—swallowed up in our culminating misfortunes; and then the tide seems to ebb away from us, and we are left stranded and broken, yet still living to bear the marks of our sufferings with us to the grave,—the grave into which we drop slowly, lingering as it were till those who have escaped our sadder fate and sailed over smoother seas precede us.

A paralysed husband reduced to imbecility; a reprobate eldest son, coarse, brutalized, and dissipated; her idol gone, lost now for ever, with an indelible stigma on his name; her youngest an object of vague distrust, for she knew no positive evil of him; her daughters still young, and for their sakes kept from home; there was nothing to which her heart could cling, or receive back a vibrating touch of sympathy from.

Amidst it all there was that little one, that

little memento of her lost boy,—spurned from its natural home by anticipation, even before it had seen the light. Her maternal heart yearned for the little unborn babe. The vacuum of her disappointed affections was to be filled by it, was even now full of it, in its helpless, forlorn, and, save by her, unwelcome entrance into a world in which there seemed no place for it.

Lady Agnes took no one into her councils now ; but her husband being comparatively well, she left him in Robert's care, and, without comment, crossed to Boulogne. Then, after an absence of a week or two, she returned, accompanied by a Norman *bonne* carrying a tiny infant,—a pale, thin, mournful-looking infant, the Ethel of our story.

As time wore on, one German bath and then another was tried for Mr. Chetwynd, chiefly perhaps to have a home for Giles, and to obtain some society for the daughters now grown up. At Baden, Blanche Chetwynd met Mr. Pelham, an Indian civil servant on leave ; and, under the circumstances, the match was considered a good one, when he married her and took her to his Residency in Bengal. Soon after this match, Mr. Chetwynd died, and in a few months Giles was

laid by his side, and then Agnes. Then Lady Agnes took possession of her dower-house, the Priory, and the handsome jointure secured to her by her settlements. Robert, of course, came in for Chetwynd Park, which Giles had managed to encumber frightfully by *post-obits*, and other ruinous methods of raising money, adopted during his father's life. Nothing would tempt Robert to return to live on his estate. Immediately after his brother's funeral, he had started for the Continent,—as he said, to nurse his estate, and pay off the debts; but rumour said much about his doings, as he went hithering and thithering. Robert Chetwynd gambled—drank—did anything, in fact, that was calculated to afford temporary excitement, without which he could not live. He had married a lady of no particular antecedents, but with some money; she liked a nomadic life too, the only point on which they agreed. England had no attractions for either, for until driven by impecuniosity to come home and “see what he could make of the old lady,” as he told his wife, he had never set his foot on his native soil since his brother's funeral.

He made a feint then of going to Chetwynd Park, but no one knew better than Robert that he

could not afford to live there or keep up the place. Fortunately a new tenant offered, so a very few weeks found him where we left him, after suddenly dropping down on his mother's home—purposely taking her by surprise—plotting, scheming, jealous lest Ethel should inherit her grandmother's property, while there were such overwhelming charges on his own impoverished estates. Hating the girl because he wanted to injure her,—determined to pick out the particulars of her birth, and if possible establish her illegitimacy,—not only establish it, but proclaim and publish it where it was evident she had hitherto been looked upon as the doubly-orphaned child of a dead son.

Some men are naturally cruel,—take pleasure in witnessing the writhing tortures of dying animals; others gloat over the wounded feelings of men, inflicting tortures more keen and intolerable than physical sufferings. This was Robert's weakness; and to make that girl *feel her place*, was an object to attain which gave keen zest to the anticipations of a visit otherwise offering little in his line of enjoyment.

The Priory was too far from the coast for the particulars of the family sorrow to have reached

the neighbourhood. No one had ever inquired into the fate of Mrs. Charles Chetwynd, where she had lived, or where she had died. "Ethel lost her mother at her birth," was Lady Agnes's unvarying assertion, and no one questioned its technical truth. And Edith?

When the dreaded hour came Lady Agnes did not fail her, as we know. She was there by her side in a secluded Norman village, to hear her tell the sad tale of her love, and her rash, disastrous marriage; of the terrible scenes with her father, when the astounding truth was made known to him;—she was there, to receive in her arms the last legacy of her darling son. Mr. Douglas chafed and fumed; but when he saw the lady, whose commanding dignity of bearing, and still well-preserved beauty, enforced involuntary homage from all, he felt rather sheepish as he remembered the daring, vulgar insolence of his letters to her. She treated him with the calm, withering indifference his conduct had deserved, her heart was with his daughter. She took the baby, and returned to Blackgang, and then Edith really went to "the East,"—a mourning widow, imposed on the world as a maiden—a "little girl" travelling for health. After long years,

when her shameful secret had been held over her by her remorseless father until the little spirit she ever possessed was completely quenched, she yielded to what she felt was but a change of masters, perhaps an improvement in that respect, —she married a rich, eccentric invalid, who had selected Palermo as his headquarters; but her new name never reached England. That "encumbrance" left in the hands of Lady Agnes often haunted Mr. Douglas, and threatened to interfere with his plans. He had prayed for its death, and it would live, in spite of him; and he knew if mother and child ever met, maternal instinct would triumph and betray him. Edith, crushed under the weight of her secret shame, had grown, under her father's harangues, to take a morbid view of her case. She was indeed a widow, and she implored her father to let her tell her husband the truth, but he would not hear of it; and then came the dread lest her secret should be discovered, and her husband resent the imposition. The Chetwynds might betray her some day; or the thousand-and-one "chances," as we profanely call the mysterious powers which govern this life, might bring about a *dénouement*. She wished she had told at first; but now that

she knew her husband, his stern honour, his withering contempt for deceit, her heart quailed for the future. Edith was going about the world with an invisible sword suspended over her head, which, at any moment, might fall and annihilate her.

CHAPTER XI.

MISS CHETWYND.

AND so, having drained his own property by gambling, as far as the entail would permit him, and having helped his wife through hers, Robert Chetwynd had returned to see what could be got out of his mother, and to establish Ethel's illegitimacy—to assume it as a matter of course—to “put her in her proper place at once,” as he said to Marion. Robert felt that he had been asleep all this time. Leaving her a tiny, squalling infant, whose life was constantly in danger, he had entirely lost sight of her relative position to himself, and the fact that she might “play old gooseberry” with his interests. He felt that in his younger days he had been indiscreet—when,

unhinged by his *illness*, he had shown his hand too plainly to his mother. He remembered, as if it were only yesterday, how that mother had looked at him after he had burned that letter. It was a thing which *had to be done* at any price; but still he felt now that it had excluded him from much valuable confidence—valuable, at least, as it had turned out, though, at the time, he had cared very little about that squealing monkey, which his mother had brought over from France; that there was some muddle about the mother he felt sure. Silence is eloquent in a case like this. “I shall assume, as a matter of course, what I suspect; and the old lady may not remember how much or how little I really know of the matter.”

It began to dawn on him that the “old lady” might leave Ethel the Priory if left to drift on in her imbecile attachment for the girl, and this, he was determined, should not be done. It should come to him by stratagem, if he could not get it in the ordinary course of things. The place would nominally revert to him at his mother's death, but how could he redeem it? He should be glad to know how he could pay off those old charges and some new ones he intended to add,

if she would let him. In his father's life, his reticence, his habit of inferring exactly the opposite of what he stated, his plausibility, in fact, gained him the ascendancy he possessed over the old man, and, through him, over his mother.

Placed at the head of affairs, much of the necessity of this self-restraint was removed. Always smooth and plausible when necessary, Robert was imperious and insolent when he could indulge safely in the natural bent of his disposition. He remembered his mother, submissive to his father's lightest wish, and, although he had seen her assert her will in the case of that child, it was under strong excitement; and he fondly believed that a little proper audacity on his part would at once give him what he called the "whip hand" at the Priory now. He quite forgot that his mother's submission was from *principle*, not from weakness; and he lost sight of the fact that since that hold had been removed, her character had regained its elasticity. She was fettered by no obligation to a son; and she had got into the fatal habit (to him) of thinking and acting on her own responsibility. A woman who once does this, and does it successfully, is not likely to be taken into leading-strings again, unless through

her affections, then, even, it is only a free concession; these little details were soon made evident to him.

From the beginning Robert had determined to ignore Ethel's claim to be called "Miss Chetwynd." This was to be the first pawn moved in the game he was to play. It was a feeler, and could easily be lost without material injury to his game. He would assume her position to be that of a poor dependent, as a matter of course, and express innocent surprise and astonishment at any other idea; and to Marion and Dora he had assigned rôles in support of this assumption. To do the former justice, she only knew what it had suited him to tell her of his brother's affairs, and she really believed Ethel to be the unfortunate offspring of Charlie's "wildness." All Dora believed was that she was some poor relation kept to wait upon grandmamma.

The very day after their arrival an incident occurred which opened the campaign, a skirmish in which the laurels did not fall to Robert's share. But before I relate it, I must go back to a previous occurrence, for I think I must say something of Mr. Caleb Williams and his footing at Woolerton. Two years before this, his third

visit to Woolerton, Caleb had suddenly made his appearance, for the first time, in the village. A few days after his arrival, he had written a respectful petition to Lady Agnes Chetwynd, soliciting permission to photograph views of her little home and domain, for artists' studies, and also trusting that she would extend her patronage so far as to allow him the honour of taking her photograph and that of any other members of her family residing with her.

Lady Agnes very good-naturedly permitted the poor photographer to take her likeness,—nay, a dozen of them, in different positions, for somehow he never seemed satisfied with his performances, and as she was blind, and was kept amused by her little favourite or Mrs. Mildmay, she was not aware how often the position of the camera had been changed, or how frequently the operation had been repeated. She had, however, only granted this *entrée* after sending her friend “Nellie” to reconnoitre, whose impressions being decidedly in favour of the artist, he was taken into favour too.

To Ethel it was something fresh and delightful added to the limited circle of her amusements. She never wearied of sitting or standing to be

taken, sometimes, it is true, with more heads than one, or with hands and feet larger than all the heads together ; but Mr. Williams talked so kindly to her all the time, that she was almost sorry when he was satisfied. Then he invited her to come and help him to select favourite bits of scenery, and, accompanied by her friend Mrs. Mildmay, she had been allowed to accept the invitations. Ethel had been fascinated by the conversation of the artist ; he was always telling her something wonderful or useful, or "setting her thinking," she said. So the girl was very sorry when autumn faded into winter, and her humble acquaintance went away ; but when spring came, and he returned, there was a renewal of those pleasant, improving meetings. Caleb Williams went and came, making excursions into Wales, he told them, but the village was his headquarters in the summer months, and he grew insensibly into a position almost of intimacy with the whole establishment, including the servants.

Lady Agnes was taken by his voice, she said it touched some hidden chord in her nature. She could not see him, so his uncouth appearance did not dispel the charm.

The present was his third summer, and he had been permitted to photograph the fine old oak library, and to copy some of the family pictures, and a few gems of art, which hung in the dining-room and galleries, while Ethel watched him attentively, and told her grandmother what was going forward.

There were failures, it is true, to be chronicled, which were enough to try the patience of the most enduring, but still, Mr. Williams went on in his own indefatigable way, until the old lady sometimes said pleasantly, "If Ethel learns nothing else, Mr. Williams, from you, your example of patient industry would be valuable to her."

It was thus that the man had established a footing at the Priory.

One day, about three weeks before this story opens, Ethel came to him during one of these visits and said she had a private commission of her own, which she would be glad if he would execute.

"There is a picture," she said, with an air of eager mystery, "I want copied for myself; only one copy, you know, for it must not be made common."

"Anything, young lady, anything to please you, and in the cause of art."

"Art" had become a cant word with this worthy man, uttered sometimes with an expression of countenance which seemed to betray that he was indulging in some secret amusement when using it. That he felt a hidden scorn for what he was doing was often palpable even to Ethel, whose large eyes opened wider as she looked to him for an explanation, but he would laugh good humouredly and say, "all 'art' was humbug, more or less."

"There is a picture of my dear father," she said, lowering her voice, "it hangs in grand-mamma's room. It is the only one in existence, and she will not part with it to have it copied, though she cannot see it. I think she *feels* it, to know that it is there. She says she will leave it to me when she dies, but I hope I may never get it in that way. It is so horrible to covet a thing very much; to long for it, you know, and then be told you will never be able to have it until some one you love dies. And yet I do so want that picture; and I think I must be wicked when I think of it even! Now, I have persuaded her to let me take it to that upper corridor, where

you say the light is good, and if you make a good copy of that, I will never cease to thank you!"

A very curious expression passed over the photographer's face during this confidential communication, but as Ethel had often remarked, he had a bad habit of making grimaces when people looked at him hard, which did not improve his beauty, but he said now, "Certainly. I shall be glad to execute any commission with which you will honour me, Miss Chetwynd. Most grateful, in fact, for your patronage."

"That's charming! Can you do it at once?"

"With the greatest pleasure."

So they proceeded together to the corridor, at the end of which was an oriel, lighted from above, and here stood the picture ready to be copied. Ethel looked fondly at it.

"Oh, Mr. Williams! Is it not a beautiful face?"

The photographer looked at it critically.

"Pretty fair. I can well imagine your deep interest in it, if it is your father's, and therefore any criticism would be impertinent."

Ethel looked pained. She had expected enthusiastic admiration, and this cool toleration was not to be endured.

"You are the first one who ever threw a doubt on its beauty. My father was *very* handsome, and this is *very* like him."

"Like him! Yes. I am certain it must have been," and drawing the back of his fingers in imaginary sweeps along the face:—"Weak! uncertain! rash! all there!" but this was as if to himself.

"But he was *not* 'weak,' nor 'uncertain,' nor 'rash!'" and Ethel's eyes filled with tears. "I am very sorry I asked you to copy it; but, never mind, I will learn and do it myself some day."

"My dear young lady," said Caleb, in tones of contrition, "I would not willingly have offended you for the world, but I sometimes think aloud, and apply technical art terms which are misunderstood. 'Weak' is sometimes applied to the execution. There may be a 'weak' copy of a very powerful face."

"But you did not *mean* that, and you know it," persisted Ethel.

"But, you know, I was only criticizing a picture. Don't you think it quite possible for a picture to express a weakness or a rashness, which may not belong to the original, and yet have a strong resemblance in contour and feature? This

is not a photo in which the lines cannot err," and Caleb hoped the last argument was conclusive.

"Yes, but I was looking at your face, and I *know* you were not struck with admiration all the same; and I was watching for it," she added innocently.

"I am very sorry I wounded you; it is a sweet face I admit, and you have many lines in common," and he scanned her features earnestly until Ethel's colour rose to her temples.

"You don't know, Mr. Williams, how strange, yet how sweet it is to me to think of my father. He died before I was born, and that picture is the one thing which embodies him to me, and fixes the idea of him in a form, you know. I love the memory of him better perhaps than I should have loved him, if he had lived and been cross with me. I feel as if I had a friend in heaven now, with whom I could hold communion. I feel that he sees me and watches over me, and that God may let him be a sort of guardian angel to me. I pray God, sometimes when I lay awake at night, that I may see him in a dream, if any harm is likely to happen to me. That is why I was so mortified at your saying he was 'weak.'"

A flush was on her cheek, but she was looking down on the carpet shyly, as if almost ashamed of uttering these ideas which had evidently taken a strong hold on her imagination, and, as if testing the folly of such fancies by the opinions she might draw forth from a stranger; but Caleb was apparently not listening to her childish prattle. He had been preparing a glass for his negative, while listening to these rather fervid outpourings of Ethel's full heart, and his attention to his "art" had been so far distracted that he managed to spill his chemicals over the carpet, had stained his hands, and finally broke the plate, and this last *contretemps* quite upset him. "Oh the horrid faces he made." He made a thousand apologies, however, for his clumsiness, and asked only for time to run home and get another plate. On his return, he had quite recovered his equanimity, took a satisfactory negative, and seemed quite in a different mood. He even went so far as to point out several beauties in that much-treasured picture.

It represented a very young man, dressed in the costume of the William IV.'s era. The hair was well-brushed off of his face in a long wave over the head, leaving bare a spacious white fore-

head, one which seemed like Ethel's, to rest on two well-cut arches ; the straight nose, which divided them, forming a delicately chiseled pillar, on which it rested. Under these arches beamed bright, mischievous, reckless eyes, of very deep blue. The mouth was soft, mobile, sensuous, there was not a line to define firmness or will, and the chin might have been that of a woman, so soft and round, and tender did it seem. It was a good sweet loving face, but certainly not a strong one.

"Phillip would have turned out something better than that now."

"Who is Phillip?"

"The man who painted that; he was quite a beginner then; he has taken high rank among artists since he did that."

"How do you know who painted it? I don't see any name."

"How would you know a letter from Mrs. Mildmay before you opened it? There is as much individuality in touch as in handwriting."

"You are a wonderful man! now, neither Grannie nor Nellie ever knew who painted that. It was done when my papa was in London, and he sent it as a surprise to his mother."

Caleb, as Ethel told Mrs. Mildmay, "went on making those horrid faces all the time," but he did not venture on further adverse criticism beyond asserting that the painter was very inexperienced in the art of making a good picture when that was done; but a scornful smile lurked occasionally about the corners of his mouth, which provoked Ethel's wrath.

"I never had to deal with him alone, Nellie, before, and I never knew him so contrary. He was actually disagreeable. I only wish Grannie had been well enough to be there. She would have silenced him about 'weakness' and that stuff, very soon, I am thinking."

The negative was taken home, and Ethel had looked forward with no small impatience for her picture to be finished; but she had not yet received it. Had she known that Caleb was leaving the neighbourhood, she would not have slept in peace that night, lest he might have forgotten her commission.

Caleb, however, had not forgotten it. He had coloured it in oils, in a style quite new then, and which made it fully equal to an oil painting in appearance—far superior to the original in some respects, for he had put in a few masterly lines

which gave a manliness and character to the face, and which, without destroying the likeness, redeemed it from the effeminacy of which he had complained. On reaching his lodgings on the evening, after he parted from Ethel at the bridge (when he had suddenly determined to strike his tent forthwith), his first task had been to put this picture into a frame, and pack it in a box. This box he directed to "Miss Chetwynd." Inside was a note to Ethel, announcing his departure, and before ten o'clock the following morning he was on his way to London.

It was luncheon time when this box arrived at the Priory, and was taken into the dining-room, where, except Lady Agnes, they were all assembled.

Ethel looked at it, and uttered a cry of delight; she fancied she knew from its shape what it contained; but Robert, who was inspecting the direction, thought it a good opportunity to begin his operations, so he turned to Dora and said—

"Little woman! here is evidently some present for you. Who could have sent it, and what can it be? Guess! A handsome book? or engravings, perhaps? Come and cut the string yourself. I will ring for a chisel."

Oh no," said Ethel, "you are quite mistaken ; it is mine, I know what it is, I am expecting it ;" and she went towards her treasure. But Robert, holding the string firmly, pointed to the direction.

"It is directed to *Miss* Chetwynd. My daughter is the Miss Chetwynd of the family."

A look of blank amazement overspread Ethel's face. Then a cry of indignation she could not suppress burst forth.

"Open it for me, please Papa," said the *enfant terrible*, and looked defiance at Ethel. "Open it, please, I long to see what it is."

All the evil in Ethel's nature rose at the indignity thus offered to her, though the full meaning of it was beyond her comprehension. She could not wrestle with her uncle for her own property, and he was coolly raising the lid with a knife from the table. Her eye gleamed like liquid fire with suppressed passion, for she saw covert malice in his ; her lips quivered as she said,—

"It matters not who opens it, you will soon see who it is for ; but if it had been intended for *her*, it would have been directed to Miss Dora Chetwynd, *here*."

"What is the meaning of this ?" said a quiet

voice behind them, and, on looking round, the tall majestic figure of Lady Agnes confronted the belligerents. She had entered quietly while they were too eager to notice her.

"Oh, Grannie dearest! Mr. Williams has sent my picture home. I know it is it, and Uncle Robert says it is for Dora—and he says, too, I am not Miss Chetwynd!"

"Robert! Is this possible? As long as Ethel is in this house, and my head is above ground, she is *the* Miss Chetwynd of the family. You forget that her father was your senior," and she turned her sightless orbs towards Robert.

Determined not to yield the box until it was opened, in spite of this rebuke, Robert forced off the lid, and looked in with a contemptuous mixture of triumph and curiosity, knowing that in this at least he could indulge with impunity, since his mother could not see him. In another instant he turned from the table, pale and ghastly. As one risen from the grave, as it were, he met the gaze of his dead brother, calm, beautiful, joyous. Marion, who had been sitting at the window an amused spectator of the "row," rushed to her husband in a state of excitement and alarm.

"My God, Robert, what ails you?"

"Don't be dramatic," said he, turning his wrath on her. "I have sent the blood to my head stooping over that d— thing, that's all;" and he turned to the window and looked out.

"I thought you had seen a ghost, or an infernal machine; you are as white as chalk! Not usual when blood rises to the head," added she maliciously.

A good round oath, muttered under his breath, told her silence was advisable; but meanwhile, Ethel in silent raptures was unfastening the picture.

"Oh, my darling Papa, how beautiful! Oh, Grannie, you should see it! If you only could! He has made it more manly and older than yours, and painted it in oils like life itself."

And heedless of every one, and knowing that her only friend disposed to sympathize with her was unable to see her treasure, Ethel strode off with it to her own room. That face was too sacred to be gazed upon by such a brother, she said, one who could insult his child, too!

As soon as she was gone, Lady Agnes spoke her mind freely, although Mademoiselle had glided into her seat during the end of the skirmish, unknown to the old lady.

"Robert, I request that such a disgraceful scene may never occur again. I do not wish to humiliate you before a young girl like Ethel, but I never will permit you to wound her in my hearing. If you do, you must expect me to express my opinion of your conduct before her, and whoever happens to be present."

"Who is her friend?" asked he, turning the conversation, after winking to the company generally, to show that he appreciated his "wiggling."

"A humble itinerant photographer, who has had my permission to take views in the Park, and who took my portrait, the one I sent you. He is a very intelligent man, and his ideas are far above his position in life. I believe he has finished off that picture as a mark of gratitude for the favour we have shown him."

"I see his bill in the box, though," said Dora, "and a number of photographs not framed," and she nodded to her father.

At this moment Ethel returned. She tried not to look too triumphant, but instead of taking her place at table, she went again to her box, and found her letter and the other views. She tore the former open with eagerness, and read:—

"Mr. Caleb Williams presents his compliments and respects to Miss Chetwynd, and trusts she will do him the honour of accepting the accompanying picture, which he has attempted to colour by the new process. He also encloses in the box impressions of Miss Chetwynd's favourite effects.

"Mr. Williams, however, regrets that he is compelled to leave the neighbourhood sooner than he anticipated, and must therefore reluctantly postpone taking the bridge scene until his next visit.

"Mr. Caleb Williams presents his grateful respects and best wishes to the Lady Agnes Chetwynd."

"Oh, Grannie, he is gone!"

"Who is gone, darling?"

"Mr. Williams! dear, clever, amusing Mr. Williams! How Nellie and I will miss him;" and ignoring the presence of the guests, she read the note to her grandmother.

"And so he cannot take me on the bridge after all! I told him I would get some one fashionably dressed to stand too, beside 'the no end of a girl,'" and she looked defiantly at her uncle; "but he said he would rather have me as

an object in the foreground than any fine lady," said she simply.

"An object! Yes," echoed Robert *sotto voce*, and his eye made the long journey from her head to her heels slowly; "there is nothing like diversity of taste."

Marion slightly, very slightly, almost imperceptibly, elevated one eyebrow a little, and made a feint to conceal a very palpable smile, while Dora also gave one of her side looks, and curled a faint sneer without an effort at concealment; but Ethel did not even see it. She despised them all now, and her mind was too full of her new treasure to care what they did. Her efforts at civility had been repulsed; she had been wantonly insulted; she would get away from them if she could; so, as soon as the meal was over, she asked Lady Agnes to spare her while she paid a visit to Mrs. Mildmay.

"Yes, and bring her back with you."

"If I can."

"Take little Dora with you, dear."

But Miss Dora drew up her little figure.

"I would rather not call on any one, thank you, until they have left their cards. Mademoiselle and I will take our promenade in the Park."

And for once Ethel liked Dora, and was obliged to her, for she longed to pour out her heart to Nellie, and that she could not do in Dora's presence.

The absurdity of her "calling" too amused Ethel excessively, for she had a lively sense of the ridiculous, and she began to regard the little creature as a thing only to be amused at. She was like a trained monkey, a parrot, or a learned poodle, rather than any manner of human child Ethel had ever known before.

Lady Agnes, too, though satire was not much in her line, was struck by the magniloquent speech; though to appreciate the effect fully she should have seen the child's air and expression.

"How old are you, Dora?"

"Nearly eleven, dear grandmamma?"

"Do little children abroad exchange cards—with elder people, too?"

The little creature wriggled and scowled; she had a dim perception of being put down or laughed at.

"*Non*, dear grandmamma, but I only visit where mamma does; she alone selects my society." And Dora looked round triumphantly.

"Quite proper, too; but Mrs. Mildmay is *my*

friend, my relation and yours, in fact, and if she takes notice of you, you may feel highly flattered. She has wonderful discrimination ; I must get her to give me her opinion of you."

Neither parent dare say a word ; they had come to be long-suffering in all things, *for a price*, and for that price Dora must "suffer" too,—that was about the conclusion at which they each arrived as they sat and listened to the dialogue in silence ; but, as Robert said afterwards, he had not bargained quite for that sort of thing at all. As to Mademoiselle, the amount of wriggling and twisting and turning of eyes all round at once that she accomplished, to show that she scarcely understood a word that was said, was marvellous to one not used to such muscular exercises.

Dora pouted. Was she—the heiress of a grander place than this *triste* prison—to be sat upon, and examined, and pronounced upon by some woman called "Nellie" by that girl Ethel ? —be "trotted out," as her father would have said. Well, she would show her paces ! She did not care for all the Nellies in Woodlandshire.

Dora left the room, thinking that if it were not too late she would go with Ethel, and then see what "Nellie" was like, and show "Nellie"

what she was like, in a distracting little love of a bonnet, which would look all the better beside the beehive of that *gauche* Ethel; but the beehive and its wearer were rapidly disappearing among the trees, for Ethel was trying to save every moment to be spent with Nellie.

CHAPTER XII.

A RÉPRIÈVE.

“Oh, Nellie! was my father ever like that man?”

This was Ethel’s first question as she threw herself, panting, into a chair at the Cottage, after her run across the Park.

“What man, Ethel? enlighten me.”

“Uncle Robert! Such a man, Nellie! But I don’t want support now,—I despise them all; and I could take care of myself if Grannie left it to me, which she don’t.”

And then Ethel opened her budget,—everything that had taken place, until she came to the cards—then she laughed outright, and Nellie thought she was exaggerating at first. Ethel

had been, during her recital, alternately angry and sad, but laughter triumphed over both in the end.

"And now tell me, Nellie, why *I* am not 'Miss Chetwynd'? I see he has something vicious in his eye against me."

"Your uncle is the family representative, and thinks his daughter ought to have precedence on that account, perhaps. I would not trouble my head about him if I were you; I told you so yesterday."

"And now, Nellie, you must come and leave a card on Dora."

Nellie laughed. She remembered her obstinacy yesterday; but she remembered, too, that she had decided on changing her tactics. She had been considering the thing, she said, and could not bear to separate herself from her friends any longer, even although Dora might be critical; so the two ladies set off together to the Priory.

"This is kind, Nellie, to come to me!"—and the old lady pressed her friend's hand, and introduced her to Marion.

"I must own I had another reason for coming to-day, which I know you will forgive. I came

to see that picture with which Ethel is so delighted."

Meanwhile Dora had been pirouetting and ogling and craning her little neck after a fashion apparently acquired from Mademoiselle. She was wondering what impression she had made on Nellie, long before Nellie had had time to notice her presence at all.

No one knew Robert better than Ellen Mildmay did. She had known him as a boy and as a young man, in many visits paid to Chetwynd Park, where his various devices for blinding his parents had not escaped her observation. He knew it, and hated her accordingly; but he did not suspect how much she did know of him, through channels little dreamed of by him,—for Nellie had made a poor match the year before the break-up at Chetwynd Park, and this was their first meeting since then. He little guessed what was passing in her mind when she coldly shook hands with him, and felt his touch send a shiver through her frame.

After dinner Dora had the pleasure of being "trotted out, and showing her paces." She knew a great deal of English slang from the gentlemen who frequented the salons abroad.

She played laboriously, and on the whole well; and then she displayed her drawings, and her graces; and when she was quite satisfied that Mrs. Mildmay was overpowered by the effect of her various accomplishments, she turned to Ethel, in a patronizing manner, and said, "You play a little, dear, I am sure." (Lady Agnes was near.)

"Come and sing with me, Ethel," said Nellie, and without giving her time to get frightened she began a symphony, and Ethel mechanically took her place at the instrument. The strangers turned, electrified at the first notes. There was a richness in that voice seldom heard among amateurs.

Ethel's song was hardly finished when "Brava, carissima!" was sounded in her ear, and she turned round.

"Gilbert! Where did you spring from?"

"From behind the sofa. I came in half an hour ago, but as no one thought me worthy of notice, I just dropped down in a heap, and have been enjoying the performance ever since, duly sensible of my own insignificance." The young man was shaking hands during this speech with his old friends. He was then introduced to

the assembled guests in form as Mr. Gilbert Pelham.

Gilbert sank into a chair beside Ethel as soon as it was practicable, and pronounced the word "Prodigious!" solemnly.

Ethel looked shyly round, and caught sight of a solemn sad face, gazing mournfully on the company.

"What is Prodigious?"

"The phenomenon,—the infant phenomenon! Ethel, it's a sell, an awful sell! Term begins to-morrow, and I came forty miles from Redburn, where there is a jolly party to-night, because I wanted one quiet evening among you all; and when I arrive, I am not even seen, and you are all engrossed with a 'phenomenon.'"

"Do be quiet, Gilbert."

"Look at my face, dear, and see how little it betrays my emotions. Look at the phenomenon, wriggling and ogling at me, and see my sublime unconsciousness of the same. Where on earth did they drop from?"

"Uncle Robert is your aunt Blanche's brother, and my uncle, Gilbert. I do wish you would behave sensibly, and let me. I cannot look like that, you know; and the very sight of your hypo-

critical face is ready to throw me into convulsions. I really want to behave myself well, so do go and talk to some one else. I am so glad you are come, for you will help me to entertain them; they only came yesterday."

"It's a sell, nevertheless; but here goes. Now, look at the phenomenon, while I put her through her paces, only don't be jealous, Ethel; you know you are driving me to it;" and Gilbert sauntered from Ethel's side, and, after making a circuit of the room, found himself drawing out Dora, while her admiring parents were enraptured witnesses. That child was the one object of Robert's unselfish affection. He really loved her foolishly, and any one could take him in by feigning admiration for her, so in a short time Gilbert found himself patronized to his own great amusement by Mr. Chetwynd. Ethel might have felt herself neglected by her old playmate, had he not occasionally made such a face at her as convinced her that she was expected to be amused with his doings; yet somehow she did not like it. She thought it inhospitable and unkind; and, then, Gilbert had always seemed to belong to herself, so, although she had asked him to be attentive, she was not pleased with him for com-

plying with her wishes. The general surface of things, however, was improved by this unexpected inroad. Gilbert was keeping his terms at Oxford in these days, and was full of those hilarious spirits undergraduates cultivate in themselves, and stimulate in each other. He was wealthy, and an orphan, and had a considerable allowance, which report said he spent freely, though few could get on the weak side of Gilbert Pelham in money matters. He stood well in general opinion, and was a wonderful favourite with Lady Agnes. She, too, was glad of the break his arrival created, as she had had a conversation with Robert that afternoon which had left its sting behind with both.

Robert had taken the opportunity of being alone with his mother to ventilate the question uppermost in his thoughts.

"You know, mother," he had said, "I never could have imagined that you would have retained that delusion about my brother's supposed marriage so long. The thing shows its own absurdity on the face of it. If it had been all square, do you think she would have taken her shame so quietly? What has become of that unhappy girl?"

"It was a choice between two shames, Robert; you forget that. Time has softened the *one* on our name, which your poor brother did not live to clear away; but she was his wife, Robert. That I can prove when necessary. Don't let that question agitate you. Her father spurned a sullied name for her; and, perhaps, he was right; God only knows. Had my boy lived he might have cleared *himself*; but as he was taken, and her father thought it better to keep her out of the blight which overwhelmed us all, she may have married well since then. She was a sweet creature, only young and foolish. I shall take care of Ethel's interest, you may rely upon that. Her mother's secrets are not mine to betray."

"It was altogether a confounded mess poor Charlie chose to bring us into; one which can never be cleared up now."

"I don't know that, Robert. That he was innocent I believe, as I hope to meet him hereafter; but murder will come out sooner or later."

"Mother! what do you mean?"

"Much, Robert! more than it would be profitable to discuss now. It was a mad act of yours to destroy that letter."

"Well, Mother, if you insist on it, just to

please you, I will treat Ethel as my niece; but I own to you that you need not expect the world to be so complaisant."

"The world shall respect her *fortune*; and any one whose respect is worth having will respect herself. She can do without the rest. You must understand, Robert, that to me Ethel is your brother's representative. She is to have all I can leave her; and what you have hinted at to-day only makes this the more necessary. I do not wish the subject disturbed or any question raised at all; but if it is raised, I can soon silence it."

"I hope you don't think I am her enemy. I am only petrified, astonished; and I tell you fairly, Mother, not convinced. I think you have been taken in."

"I have the certificates, Robert; and if they are only copies, they will lead to the trace of genuine ones when required."

"Let me see them, Mother. Ladies don't understand these things."

"Your brother did. No, Robert, I will not show them to you. A burnt child dreads the fire! Robert, I am blind now, and even less able than formerly to meet treachery. When you do see them, it shall be through my solicitor; but I re-

peat—I do not wish the past to be recalled at present. Would that I could forget it.”

“Well, mother, I had no idea you were in such a state of mind. I don’t care about seeing them, only to form an opinion, you know, being the only man in the family. It certainly is my duty to watch over my niece’s interests.”

“I would rather that this matter should not be discussed between us, especially when you are my guest.”

Robert almost whistled aloud. Here was a go for him! The old lady had turned out a very tough card indeed; and he felt that he had been remiss in leaving her so long to “grow rusty.”

Under the circumstances, then, Gilbert’s in-road was a pleasant break to all parties. And so Robert patronized the young man; and Marion, faded matron though she was, shook out her feathers, and brushed up her company manners for him; while Dora must have strained some of the sinews of her neck and limbs (had they not been inured from infancy to such exercise as she gave them) in her efforts to impress him with her grace. Nellie was highly amused, after all; the stagnant surface of their daily life had seldom been broken by anything so refreshing in the

shape of variety. There was more music; Ethel sang again and again; while Gilbert drew forth Dora's ideas on almost every subject."

"What a cure!" whispered he to Ethel, after her last song.

"What is a cure? I did not know any one was ill!" said Ethel, simply.

"Why, the phenomenon is 'a cure;' in fact, she is 'the perfect cure.' But I won't attempt to explain the meaning of the term, it is a great mystery. You ask Dora, she knows, I am certain; only don't tell her I told you she was that thing. Mrs. Mildmay has neglected your education in some things, Ethel. Dora is far ahead of you in the niceties and idioms of your mother tongue."

"I am sure Nellie does—;" but Ethel chanced to look at her cousin, and his face was quite enough to silence her in her intended defence of her friend; both laughed out merrily, without another word being spoken.

"I think I will stop over to-morrow, at least, till the night train, and then we can have a ride. Get Robin to find a pony to mount the phenomenon, and we can take a scamper through the lanes together.

But Dora could not ride, and although Ethel gave her own old, quiet pony for her to learn on, she usurped nearly all the attention she could contrive to attract to herself from both her father and Gilbert, so that Ethel was constantly in the shade,—and the little monkey liked it.

On Sunday the Paris bonnets which were displayed in the Priory pew quite eclipsed all other considerations. The good Vicar's sermon fell on many heedless ears, even his wife had to take a sly glance at his MS. to be certain of his text, and be thus qualified to discuss it in guarded and general terms to the Sunday-school children. Marion was queen of that hour at all events, and Mrs. Grymes determined to get a bonnet just like hers before next Sunday.

Then came the round of visitors, county families, and general neighbours, who came to call on Lady Agnes's friends. It kept them alive while it lasted, and then returning these visits gave them something to do. There were a few dinner parties, and one at the Priory to inaugurate her son in the county, but it would not do. All was flat to Robert. He tried to shoot, but he did not care for it, although there was plenty of game in

that thickly wooded county. There were billiard-tables, but no high play; there was decorous whist, shilling points and no more, and with ladies in the game, too. It was all child's play to him. The sound of the dice was a necessity to him, and he pined to be away and among congenial spirits. There was something in the perfectly respectable tone of the country gentlemen who visited him which jarred on his spirit; their equal in family and position, he had nothing in common with them. Deep drainage, high farming, even political questions had no interest for this alien, who had formed his tastes and habits in German or Italian cities; he could not adjust himself to an English country life. His spirit was chafing too, because he had failed in his object after sacrificing himself to attain it. While his mother's life was spared, it was plain he had no chance against Ethel directly; and after the *quietus* he had received on his first interview, the more pressing and immediate object of his visit, to raise money for present operations, had to be broached with care. In fact, Robert spent some weeks trying to convince his mother of his exemplary life, bemoaning the terrible "dip" given to the estate by Giles; lamenting his own ignorance

and inability to manage money when he first came into the property. Now, he assured her he had become an economist—resorted to all sorts of dodges to save—but the confounded interest on the old mortgages run away with his rent-roll. Then he had a new tenant who was to give him a high rent, only he wanted new furniture, kennels and stables to be repaired and built,—a great outlay in fact. All this time Robert had grown especially civil to Ethel, and attentive in a covert way to Nellie. It is true, he avoided all *têtes-à-tête*, and rarely looked her full in the face; but he was courteous to an excess before his mother, and irreproachable now in his demeanour to every one else. Mrs. Grymes, who had been asked to dinner once, declared that Mr. Robert, or rather, “Mr. Chetwynd,” was a perfect gentleman, and that his foreign life had polished him up and made him far superior to the county men in his manners. As to Mrs. Chetwynd, her bonnets were beauties and her silks stood on end! and they were a decided acquisition to the parish.

All this good behaviour met its reward. The old lady's heart thawed to her only remaining son, and she, by degrees, asked him the particulars of his embarrassments. By little and little

he grew confidential, that is, he told her a good case for himself, made out for the occasion, and dwelt on the value which a few thousands would be to him now—for that furniture, stabling, etc., etc. Now, the old lady had been saving, and she had a few thousands put by. And it often happens that when we have been unusually stern with a person on one point, a sort of compensating spirit moves us to make up to them in another; Lady Agnes felt that she had hit very hard for her in that first private interview, and for that very reason she did not wish to be implacable—she wished to conciliate her son, not to drive him from her, and it came round, therefore, that she consented to lend the money he required, before he had formally asked for it. Some deed was executed, and a good deal of law was got through, securing the money on the property; but then no interest was required, and Robert felt convinced he would never be asked to return it.

And now, what had he to detain him any longer in Woodlandshire? He had to consider *les convenances*—he could not start at once; but dear little Dora, who did not like Woodlandshire either, fortunately got a cough. It was evident the place was damp, and that tender plant had

been reared in more sunny climes. Then Marion got neuralgia, and the whole house was set in commotion. The Doctor from the square house in the village came daily, and the case puzzled him, for he could detect no outward signs of that painful complaint. Then Marion suggested "damp" as the cause. At once the good Doctor was bestride his favourite hobby, and away at full gallop. Of course it was all those creepers and trees about the place; he had often suggested that the superabundant vegetation should be removed; it was hopeless to hint such a thing to Lady Agnes, he said.

"Of course not. Not for worlds should her beautiful place be disfigured for my sake. No, Doctor, Baden is the climate for me; I am always well there."

And thus it came to pass that for dear Marion's health, Robert was obliged to tear himself prematurely from his dear mother's home, where he had hoped to pass a happy winter renewing old ties. If the truth was known, no one was particularly sorry when the whole party drove away one fine morning. The sun seemed to shine more brightly for Ethel after they had gone; and as for the departing guests, their spirits rose

as the ivy-mantled gables faded from their view. The change of air worked such a miraculous improvement in Marion that no symptoms of neuralgia were heard of again.

Ellen Mildmay had occasionally watched a hawk hovering over some timid quarry, and when she had believed its fate sealed, had seen it unexpectedly scared away; somewhat of the same feeling intensified possessed her when she knew they were off—she drew a long breath of relief—"saved for the present!" She did not know of all that had passed between that mother and son—of the intangible hold the old lady possessed over him—of the loose thousands which had changed hands, or that the evil designs only slumbered for a time—she only saw the surface, she only knew that Robert was gone; for confidential with her on all other topics, the old lady was impenetrable in whatever concerned her son.

CHAPTER XIII.

ZILLAH.

THERE are times when some impending calamity seems to us imminent, when from watching and dreading without ceasing, our minds, or nerves, become so preternaturally stimulated that the most trivial and inconsequent incident alarms us, when a knock or a ring sets our hearts beating, when the most commonplace word or deed has a significance to us which no one else can infer from them, when even the absence of the thing dreaded seems at length to leave a vacuum,—until as the time passes and nothing arrives, we actually miss the presence of the expected intruder, dreaded though its presence may have been.

Ellen Mildmay had felt so certain that Robert

intended to remain at the Priory, to take up his residence, and assume the same influence over his mother that he had formerly acquired over his father, the end of all of which she could not foresee, that she actually was taken aback when at the end of two months he declared his intention of going abroad again. Ellen was very grateful to Marion for getting neuralgia, and thereby expediting their departure from the Priory, but it took some time for her to realize the value of the reprieve. She had bent the whole energies of her mind to the task of opposing Robert, and there was nothing tangible to oppose! She was like a knight of old who, having buckled on his armour and ridden forth armed cap-à-pié to meet a foe, found himself master of an inglorious field. Veracity forbids me to assert that Ellen regretted this; it would have horrified her to have hinted at such an idea, but there are positive and negative degrees of disappointment, and the pains that she took to persuade herself that she ought to be thankful was the best argument that her joy was not quite unalloyed. Ellen did not seek a fight, but being prepared for it, she would have been better pleased to have had it out and perhaps have

conquered, than to have had the contest deferred. She felt as we do sometimes when a thunderstorm seems inevitable, and then passes over us to lower on the horizon. We feel that it may probably return, and that we shall then have suffered its effects twice over. She could only therefore draw a long breath, and feel that she *ought* to be relieved, and was not—sufficiently so to satisfy her. She saw the cloud in the distance still lowering across Ethel's path, and, in utter ignorance of the passages which had occurred between mother and son, was at a loss to guess even how much the latter had accomplished—at a loss to surmise what the next move would be, or what secret plottings might not be going on in that brain always fertile for mischief.

Ethel's unconsciousness was her best chance of enjoying her present, unclouded by anxieties for the future, and a knowledge of the dark shadow looming across that future, could not avert its effects when the time came. She tried to form and strengthen the girl's character and principles, and to correct rather than subdue that rugged independence which seemed born of her rural training. It was certainly no inheritance, for neither the clinging, unstable timidity of the

mother, nor the rash, loving thoughtlessness of the father could be traced in their child.

There was not much room for cultivating "manner and deportment" in Woolerton, but Ellen comforted herself with an axiom not sufficiently recognized, "Cultivate the heart, and the manners will cultivate themselves;" and under the insensible influence of such a *grande dame* as her grandmother, albeit of the old régime, Ethel could not well be vulgar.

All this time Ellen was thinking, plotting, and planning alone, in her loving solicitude for those dear friends to whom her life was now devoted, she could have no confidant; for, with all her intimacy and confidence on every other subject, with Lady Agnes there existed always an impenetrable reserve about Robert,—of poor lost Charlie, though with suspicions of all sorts still unremoved from his name, the old lady would discourse fondly, and she was glad of an interested listener, one who knew him well. Of Robert she seldom spoke, even after his visit, and then it was with that stately dignity of manner which forbade any discussion of his merits or demerits. That reserve expressed more eloquently than words the fact, that with this, her

last surviving son, were connected associations too painful to dwell upon or discuss, even with her dearest friend.

In this, their first meeting, the old lady, not being able to see Marion's elaborate toilettes, was left to judge of her by her conversational powers. Marion had nothing particularly to say for herself; she did not trouble herself to win on the old lady, who considered her an "inconsequent little doll of a thing." Dora's impression was less negative, she was a positive grievance to her grandmother, a forced, unnatural epitome of premature womanhood, with an unmusical voice. There was a secret rejoicing that Ethel was not like her. Her child should be a pure, true specimen of an English girl, of any higher type of her sex; she did not admit the existence; altogether, the only sincere mourner for the departed was Mrs. Grymes, to whom Marion seemed a superior being, and Dora a "sweet little pocket darling."

Ethel had always been a fair horsewoman since she could sit on a pony, long before total blindness had shut her out from the loving eyes of her grandmother; she had sat her pony well, and old Robin, the coachman, had taken no

small pride in the progress of his pupil under his instructions. Billy, her pony, a beautiful dapple grey then, had been a birthday present, when the little girl had arrived at sufficient proficiency to enable her to manage him. As Ethel's legs gradually extended themselves to "no end" of a length, it became apparent to all who saw her that she had fairly outgrown her favourite steed, but there was such love between the dumb pet and his young mistress that I question how much longer the partnership might have continued but for Dora's arrival, when Billy was cheerfully resigned to her use, in spite of all the ill-nature the little thing had displayed towards her cousin.

One or two rapidly enunciated opinions, from Mademoiselle to Marion, when that excellent functionary laboured under the delusion that the stately old lady did not understand her language, effected an object she certainly did not contemplate. Lady Agnes had said nothing at the time, but the next day Roger was called into council. There were one or two mysterious journeys upon which he was absent. Then the whiteheaded old retainer had come home one evening after dark, accompanied by a helper, with an almost perfect

lady's horse in his charge, a beautiful chestnut, faultless in all its paces, with an exquisite mouth, gentle and playful, yet full of spirit and fire.

"Who owns that chestnut, mother? I saw it in the stable this morning, and Roger tells me it belongs to some lady friend of yours. I don't know if it is stupidity or insolence, but the old brute thinks it too much trouble to give one a satisfactory answer to anything." This was at breakfast.

"Was he uncivil to you, Robert?"

"No, I can't say he was uncivil, but he is such a stuck-up, consequential old blackguard that he seems to think he is condescending when he vouchsafes an answer, even in his blandest tones."

"He told you the simple truth on this occasion. The horse belongs to a lady of my acquaintance. I did not authorize him to tell any one to whom it belongs."

"If I were living here, I would buy it."

"The horse is not for sale."

Eager eyes had been flashing inquiringly, from face to face, at that breakfast-table,—Ethel's among the rest,—she thought it *might* be Miss Dacre's horse, that young lady owning, among others, a chestnut, but she would not venture on

an opinion ; still the chestnut excited her silent speculations.

"You will all ride to-day, I believe ; Dora must become a good horsewoman. Robert, you ride with them, I suppose ?"

"Yes, if I can get a decent mount."

"Perhaps, dear grandmamma, Ethel would prefer Billy, in that case I cannot ride."

"Oh, never mind about Billy. Ethel can ride anything, Dora. Roger will see to that, my child. Go and dress, all of you ; I don't like the horses to paw up my gravel, I *feel* it when I go out."

Before they were dressed, Billy and Robert's horse were at the door ; but as yet there was nothing for Ethel.

Lady Agnes had come out into the porch with Marion, to *hear* them off, when the latter exclaimed, "Roger is riding that chestnut round with a skirt on !"

The old lady only smiled blandly, until she heard Ethel's step, then she said, "What do you think of that horse, my love ?"

"Lovely ! Oh, Grannie ! there is nothing like it, near this. Whom does it belong to ? My darling Billy, your nose would be out of joint, if I had that creature, much as I love you, my brave old beast !"

"That chestnut is yours, my darling! A present from your old Grannie. You have been so good about Billy, and I understand Dora looks so well on him, that I think he must be too small for you. Kiss me as much as you please, dearest, but honour where honour is due; you owe that horse to Mademoiselle! but for her it would not have occurred to me how much you have outgrown your old steed. You remember, Marion, what she said, last week, to you in the oriel?"

Marion *did* remember, and so did the governess, now standing with Dora to hear the mystery unravelled,—both had the grace to blush and exchange guilty glances; but Ethel only saw her horse,—she was devouring her grandmother afresh with kisses, while over her shoulder she was feasting her eyes on her new property.

"Go away and mount now, I think I hear your uncle's step."

"I say, who the d—l is that horse for? I thought he was left here under Roger's care, and not to be used?"

The under-groom was dumb, but the old lady heard her son.

"The chestnut is Ethel's, Robert, but I wished to enjoy the pleasure of giving her a surprise."

Robert considered that any reply to this was unnecessary. He mounted, spurred, whipped, and curbed his horse at the same moment, setting the gravel flying in all directions, and doing his utmost to disconcert Ethel while mounting this strange horse ; but she had Roger to put her up, and, once mounted, she turned a smiling triumphant face to the group standing at the door. Alas ! the only eye to return a sympathetic glance was veiled in darkness. Dora was sulky, (Billy was a nasty little beast this morning to Dora,) but Ethel would ride up close to her grandmother to thank her once more. Then she cantered off and joined the taciturn pair who accompanied her. Her chestnut was enough for her that day, and father and daughter gradually shook off their jealous tempers. And, now they were gone, Ethel resumed her old rides attended only by Roger.

When Gilbert Pelham was with them, he had often accompanied her in the days when Billy was sufficient to satisfy her ambition ; but Gilbert had never seen Zillah yet, and Ethel's heart was set on his approval of her mare ; she had not seen him since his inroad, during the early days of her uncle's visit, and the anticipation of what he would say of her beauty beguiled many hours.

Gilbert was her one friend of anything approaching her own age, for although Nellie had one daughter, that girl was almost a stranger to her. She had been adopted by her father's family in her infancy, at a time when it seemed the best thing possible for her future welfare; since her husband's death, Ellen had often sighed for her child; but her poverty and the opposition showed to her wishes by both the rich aunt, who had adopted her, and the girl herself, prevented her enjoying a sight even of her, except at rare intervals.

Ethel had acquaintances, but no intimates, save Gilbert, and he was now fast reaching manhood, when, in Ethel's opinion, he would be quite beyond her—beyond taking interest in her girlish pursuits. The time, it was true, had not come yet, and so she felt sure he would be in a state of rapture at the sight of Zillah, whenever the happy hour arrived when she could introduce her two friends to each other.

The time did arrive, and unexpectedly too,—a time which, in after years, Ethel often remembered too well.

CHAPTER XIV.

WINNING THE BRUSH.

It was one of those winter days "when a southerly wind and a cloudy sky" alike invited the huntsman and the more modest equestrian, who was content with the roads and turfy lanes of the neighbourhood, to enjoy a sharp trot or exhilarating canter.

"Just the day for a ride," was Ethel's exclamation after leaving the breakfast-table, and sauntering to the window previous to beginning her studies. So Zillah was in requisition after a due amount of work had been accomplished; and attended by the faithful Roger, Ethel set forth. She did not ride to cover, or talk like a stable-boy to display her equine erudition; but no

young lady in Woodlandshire, even the fastest of them all, enjoyed a ride more intensely than Ethel did after her own light. She would have liked to hunt had such an idea been admissible in her grandmother's hearing; but she looked with unfeigned admiration on Miss Dacre, a neighbouring Diana, when mounted on her splendid bay, and accompanied by her brother, she rode to a meet.

As she rode along, Ethel began to speculate on Zillah's antecedents. Had she ever been hunting? and in fancy Ethel was flying across fields, not exactly taking stiff fences, but following hounds, and enjoying the pace. She had often sat on Billy's broad old back, and watched a hunt in the distance, the steady old fellow soberly winking to kill time while he patiently awaited her pleasure; but Zillah was quite another thing. What would she do! Would she stand quietly and look on? Roger was close behind her, and of course nothing could happen; but still, there was a certain excitement in speculating on what might happen, should any chance lead her near a hunt.

There is an adage somewhere to the effect that in calculating chances the thing we imagine as pro-

bable never happens as we picture it to ourselves. My own experience contradicts this assertion.

On this memorable day Ethel rode on, living her own little life, and riding her own imaginary race as she almost mechanically trotted along the road, which was in admirable order for that pace, or when she came to strips of grassy turf, availing herself of it for a canter. Zillah's feet had become objects of interest to her. Just as the road left the more planted district, and emerged from confining hedges, reaching a spot where a large common was only separated from it by a ditch, in which a flock of ducks were enjoying themselves, while geese in large troops waddled about the green, something suddenly bolted out of the hedge on the left, crossed the path about a hundred yards before her, and swiftly made its way along the common. Startled geese and ducks instinctively made way for the intruding fugitive, though, having no time to spare now, he was a less formidable visitor than he might prove on some early morning when he elected to pay them a premeditated visit, should his present race be crowned with success.

Zillah's ears were elevated in one moment, and her whole body quivered with excitement.

"Hold her well in hand, Miss! Hold her well in hand! There he goes! There's the fox, and the hounds will be on us in no time. We better get on, and out of the way of them."

"Oh, Roger! let me see it. I never was so near before, and I shall have more fun sitting here than those who are riding after the hounds on tired horses. What fun!"

As she spoke, first one hound, then another, and then the whole pack burst out from the other side, where they had lost the scent for a time. Almost under Zillah's heels they rushed, over the ditch, and away across the common. If Billy's philosophy or his laziness were proof against such temptation, Zillah had no such safeguard. She did not wait to know her rider's pleasure, but before Ethel could recover her surprise, she found herself leading the hunt, close on the hounds, poor old Roger following in a state of mixed tribulation and delight,—his instincts all aroused with the scene, and yet in dire dismay for his young lady, lest anything should happen.

"Bless her, she sits like a queen!" was his ejaculation, as he puffed along at an unwonted pace for him. "Bless her, she will like it—and it ain't nobody's fault, for the meet was ten miles

away, and who'd a thought of their coming this way?"

Soon one huntsman came up, then another, then a stray pink coat, then two amazons with red faces and hair ruffled by the wind, then the whole remaining field; but still Ethel, on her fresh mare, kept the lead,—poor old Roger's horse, though urged by his rider to his best pace, falling sadly in the rear, and making the old man's heart turn cold and chill at his powerless position towards his charge.

"Lord keep her safe! for I can't come up with her nohow,"—and he and his fat carriage-horse toiled along,—furze-bushes, puddles, and stones being the chief impediments in their way. There were no breakneck leaps before them; that was a comfort to the old man, although his young lady did "sit like a queen." She was on far ahead, "going like the waves of the sea, and as if she had been at it all her life, bless her," and still he could not get nearer. The field, or rather the greater portion of it, had passed him, led by the two women, for ladies they were not, and a slight young man in pink, whom he recognized.

"Pretty doings, young man! I should like to know what company such is for you?"

Still Zillah kept ahead, her light burden and fresh wind giving her a decided advantage ; and Ethel, scarcely estimating her enviable position, glorying in the pace only as a race ; she knew so little of the course of these events, that although she saw almost under her eyes the dogs gaining on the fox, and then closing round it, the huntsman riding up, and her own well-practised mare slackening her speed and taking almost human interest in the sport, it was only when two gentlemen approached her, and presented her with the brush, that she realized her proud and enviable position, or the honour she had achieved. She little knew the rage which her feat had excited in the breasts of those two whom she had outstripped, and, as they said, "defrauded of their rights."

"Pelham!" had gasped one, "who the deuce is that girl on the chestnut? Where did she come from? Who is she with? Confounded shame, after ten miles run"— "You know the country, who is she? You must know"—came from one and the other. But "Pelham" did not know, and he was glad he did not, for he felt that in leading him into a part of the country where he was so well known, and in such com-

pany Reynard had served him an ill-natured trick. The chestnut was a stranger to him, and so he argued must be its rider, and when he approached that rider in company with the master of the hounds, with the brush, Gilbert Pelham was speechless with surprise at the sight of Ethel Chetwynd! She had turned her back on the group of horsemen as soon as she saw that the death of the fox had ended the run; her young heart was touched for the poor beast, and while she waited for Roger to come up and tell her what was to be done next, she withdrew from the crowd.

"Ethel! is this possible? Can it be you?"

"Yes, Gilbert, it is; and you cannot be more surprised than I am to find myself here, I assure you. Zillah would come, and it all happened so suddenly. I hope Gran will not be angry," she whispered.

"Don't tell her. It's no use, and you could not help it, you say."

"Oh, Gilbert—"

"Pelham, do me the honour of introducing me to this lady, as I have not the pleasure of her acquaintance and you have."

And then Ethel, blushing until she looked handsomer than Gilbert had ever seen her, was

introduced to Mr. Joyce, and received the brush at his hands.

She held the thing as if in courtesy she must take it, and would rather not,—as if still warm and by no means free from blood it was a sort of pollution to her, but she said something inaudible, and looked her thanks with a ladylike instinct which answered the purpose of *savoir faire* on the occasion. Roger was now by her side, exultant at the cheaply-won victory of his young mistress.

“Gilbert, must I keep this? Can't I throw it away as soon as I get away from these people, for it is very nasty?”

“Why, there is not a man 'nor a woman,’” he said, awkwardly, “who is not hating you for having won it.”

“Oh, give it then to whoever you like, for I don't want it, I assure you: Only that it would seem rude, I would gladly throw it away at once.”

“Don't do that here, Ethel, or the act would not be appreciated. They would laugh at you. You can get rid of it, however, when out of sight. You should fasten it to your saddle.”

“Why should I have it all?”

“For being first in at the death.”

"Oh, then it was all accident, and perhaps some of those who are hating me for winning it, really deserve it more; they have ridden so many miles for it. Take it and offer it to the one you think deserves it most. One of those,—those persons there,—those—" and her colour heightened, "those people who came after me; the women, I mean, though they don't seem ladies. Do they belong to the hunt?"

"There is always a mixture on these occasions, Ethel, and they are certainly not in your circle. Ride home, now though, and get away from among these people. Lady Agnes would not like it talked about; and stay, if you like to give me the brush, and let me make some pretty speech on your behalf, I may, at least, satisfy one candidate, and mollify one enemy,—perhaps turn away all the enmity from you."

"There, do take it, and say that I cannot wear laurels not fairly won."

"Nothing could be better; you are beginning young, Ethel. I'll say it, only ride away. I hate to have them staring at you."

Dire was the disappointment of Roger when his young mistress rode off without the brush; that trophy had in imagination been paraded

before all comers stableward, and had been hung up among other such memorials with Roger's own hand, to be displayed to the coming generations as a proof of his lady's prowess at fourteen, when the vision vanished, dispelled by the transfer of the gory emblem from her hands to those of Gilbert Pelham. He said nothing, however, for some time; he could not trust himself, in fact, to discuss the matter in those respectful terms alone admissible towards her. Roger never had been so put out with her in his life, he said afterwards, especially when he heard to whom the coveted tail had been assigned.

"Roger, who are those ladies who were with the hunt?"

"None of your sort, Miss ('brazen hussies' had been his comment, *sotto voce*). As to names, the're nayther here nor there. That sort calls themselves anything as turns up to them, and pleases their fancy."

"But, Roger, I saw Mr. Pelham riding and talking with them, and they ought to be ladies, though they don't look like them, certainly. It is not their faults, perhaps, if they are not nice looking, like Miss Dacre, or some other ladies I saw coming up at a distance; but I don't like

their voices, or the words I heard them speak, and I am sure Mr. Pelham knows them."

"Maybe he do, Miss, and all sorts of mixters comes to hunts now-a-days. Such as they, horse-jockeys' daughters, or maybe she-jockeys. Women from circuses, a-bringing of their circus tricks among gentry, and a leading on of young ladies to break their necks. They're strangers in these parts, anyhow, and the sooner they take theirselves off, the better, I say. They ain't to be spoken of among gentry; and, Miss Ethel, although I ain't the one to keep nothing from my lady, if you please, and I may be so bold, don't you be talking about them sort to every body. The likes of them ain't to be talked of by your sort."

Ethel rode home, if not with her trophy at her pommel, with a new idea to work out and investigate. She felt that the old man was subduing a wrath that still would make itself seen in spite of his untutored efforts. She felt that he saw more than she did in the *pêle-mêle* mixture of ladies and *others*, she knew not who, in any sport; and when, as they rode leisurely home, and the amazons again crossed their path, this time galloping their already jaded steeds at some distance

from them, accompanied by some pink coats, and when the old man's shadow on the ground betrayed his gesticulations to her, as he shook his whip after them in impotent rage, thereby getting rid of some of his pent-up indignation,—this opinion was confirmed.

CHAPTER XV.

TWO LADIES FROM BOHEMIA.

THERE is no more exclusive aristocrat, no member of society so fastidious about caste and character, as the old-fashioned, long-serving domestic of a good ancient family. These men participate in the honours and share the humiliations of their masters, often in a more intense degree; and they have, as passive spectators of the game of life, generally a truer estimate of their positions than the principals engaged in it. Roger "knew the world," he said; he "had been in good services all his life, town and country;" and although he in this case had not quite hit the mark in his conjectures as to the social status of the obnoxious equestrians, he was not far from it. The sight of those two interlopers was, in Roger's

opinion, an insult to the county—the county families, to one of which (as a retainer) he belonged,—was “proud to belong,” he added to himself.

“Yes,” he said, as his whip administered imaginary castigations on the delinquents, incl-
their pink-coated attendants, who address
were addressed by the pair. “Yes, one’s got a
sister at home, and another has one on the field,
a-riding like a lady! We’ll hear of *that* lot at
our county balls next, and our Miss Ethel a’most
a woman. A-tempting and a-daring of their
betters to follow them and break their necks!
It ain’t to be expected as ladies can ride like pro-
fessionals from the circus, no more nor gentle-
men can fight like the fancy; yet these brazian
minxes must come here, a-showing off theirselves
and what they can do—a-making of their betters
look small! I like everybody and everything in
its own proper place, I do,—and they ain’t in
theirn among gentry. And him, too! And
he’ll be coming to my lady, as if butter couldn’t
melt in his mouth!” (and he referred to our ac-
quaintance, Gilbert Pelham).

Roger’s ire might have been mollified had his
young mistress retained the trophy she had so

unexpectedly won; but in returning it she had unconsciously heaped coals of fire on the heads of those, one of whom Roger justly concluded would be the recipient of it. Ethel's position in the race had given her no opportunity of witnessing the performances of the rest of the field, were all behind her, even if the novelty of the whole scene had not made it impossible for her to think of anything but her own share in it. With Roger, on the contrary, the case was very different. His fat, heavy horse gave him ample time to see—and hear too—what was passing. He had heard “one of them minxes” use strong language in reference to his young lady, and address that language to Gilbert Pelham; and by reason of Gilbert's ignorance of Zillah, the offender had escaped unreprieved. “And after all, to think that Miss Ethel should send the brush back, and she to get it!” Can we wonder, then, at the feelings which stirred the heart of the old man, and found vent in those impotent menacing gestures which the declining sun had betrayed to Ethel's wondering eyes, as he followed close behind her on her way home? His shadow on the ground, in its grotesque exaggeration, was something wonderful to behold.

Ethel walked straight into her grandmother's presence on her return. The old lady was sitting as usual in her own snug corner, and Ellen Mildmay was reading the 'Times' to her.

"Nellie, please put down the paper; I've got something to tell you that will surprise you both very much, and you won't think of the 'Times' any more to-day. Only before I tell you, Grannie dearest, you must promise me not to be angry about a thing I could not help. It was the purest accident; I really could not help it, and I did not mean it. It was the greatest surprise in the world to me, and it was the most glorious thing that has happened to me in my life,—so some people would say. And yet, dearest, I am afraid to tell you! Feel me all over, and be sure I am safe!"

"Let me feel if your little head is safe on your shoulders, at any rate, for you seem to have lost it, or some of its contents! What ails the child, Nellie? Look at her, and tell me if it is my own Ethel who is in this state of excitement!"

"It is certainly Ethel, apparently the Ethel who left us this morning, saving a pair of very much more sparkling eyes, and two very rosy cheeks!"

"Tell me, my child, what your adventures have been. I don't like suspense, and I don't think I can be very angry for what you say was not your fault."

"I have only been hunting, Granny dearest, and won the brush." She said this very demurely.

"Hunting! Oh, Ethel, how did it happen? And why did you go?—and why did Roger let you?"

"Roger could not help it, Gran. I could not help it; and as to how it happened, why, it was so like a flash of lightning, that I can only say it was just so like one,—that it happened! If the fox would come just before Zillah's eyes, and the hounds too, when we were not expecting them, and if the darling could not help following her instincts and going after them, I had nothing left me to do but to sit on her back, and enjoy it. We were before the whole field, and I was sorry for that, because I could not help seeing the dogs kill the poor fox; but then the master of the hounds came up, and actually offered me the nasty bleeding tail,—as if I wanted the disgusting thing!"

"And what did you do with it?"

"Oh, I gave it back to Gilbert, for he was there, and asked him to give it to whoever liked to have it, as they had earned it by their long ride. Even if the horrid thing had been anything else, you know it would not have been right to keep what I won only by accident; I should have been ashamed of it all the same. I would rather win dear old Nell's commendations for my self-denial than all the foxes' tails in England."

"How do you know that I shall commend you?"

"If you do not, I know you will approve of me, which is the same thing, you know."

"Virtue should be its own reward, Ethel," chimed in her grandmother, with a smile.

"Yes, dearest, that is very well in its way, but still the applause of men,—at least women, in my case,—and those I love, too, is more satisfactory. I am not quite self-reliant on those points yet, Nellie. My conscience is not quite enough for me, dearest," turning to Lady Agnes.

The old lady smiled, and caressed her fondly.

"Rather too soon, my pet, for that yet. I don't want you to be *too* strong-minded. It was not a recommendation in my day, though

the march of intellect has made it fashionable for young ladies to be manly and forward and all that is odious in my opinion. My darling must be a true English girl; modest and retiring, and submissive to the old heads about her."

"To yours and Nellie's always; but there are some old heads—well, never mind about them. I must go and take off my habit, now I know you are not going to scold me."

"But, Ethel, this accident must be no precedent. You must keep away from the hounds in future."

"If Zillah will let me, I will do it for your sake; but it was *so* delightful,—right away across Finchington Green, and the Common beyond! Such a race! And how the geese waddled off, although the poor fox had enough to do to look after his own affairs, without thinking of them!"

"Who got the brush at last?"

"I am sure I don't know. There were two strange, vulgar-looking ladies who came up after me,—strangers, I think,—so I suppose Gilbert must have given it to one of them; but he advised me to hurry home, for fear you should be

anxious, so I did not see how it ended. I felt queer enough when I found myself among all those strange gentlemen, and I was glad enough to see some one I knew among them. I was so startled, I never thought even of introducing Zillah to him. And yet I have thought so often of the time when I should show her to Gilbert, and surprise him. He did not seem a bit astonished at my new horse; he was so petrified to find that the lady on the chestnut was me."

"How did Gilbert get there?"

"He did not tell me. The meet was ten miles the other side of Finchington, and that is seven from this; so I suppose he is staying somewhere. But I must go and take off my habit"—and Ethel was glad to escape.

Somehow she was, though unconsciously so, glad to avoid discussing her rivals on the field, or implicating Gilbert with them to her grandmother and cousin. She liked Gilbert, and it gave her a pang to couple his name with people of whom Roger could speak so disrespectfully, and over whom this model old man could shake a horsewhip. Then, Gilbert's manner was strange,—he was so anxious for her to go. It would never do to talk of all this, and give a wrong

impression of him, perhaps, when she could not make out what it meant herself. For all that, the face of the younger woman haunted her for many a day, as she surveyed her insolently and contemptuously during the few moments during which she had been recognized by Gilbert. The style of countenance, the air, the voices of both, were new experiences to her, things to shrink from as outraging her taste.

* * * *

And who were these intruders? Nothing quite as bad as Roger surmised. The elder woman, who was coarse, bold, and frowsy in appearance, though not of the class to which Roger had unhesitatingly ascribed her, was still one of those who had forfeited her original position in society by some early error. Not received among her own people, it was somewhat to her credit that she had not fallen lower still in the moral scale; a woman of some talent and great energy, she had, after years of vicissitude and privation, succeeded in earning a competence by means of her pen; her bodily presence excluded from their drawing-rooms and boudoirs, her spirit was an ever-present influence with many of her own caste and sex, who, in blessed ignorance of her ante-

cedents, devoured her works, paraded and discussed them with their friends, and imbibed the subtle poison of her stimulating and, at the same time, enervating productions. She had long ago vanished from the scenes of her youth, and her name had been tabooed in decorous circles; erased from the family Bible, and the peerage, by a father's stern hand: but under a *nom de plume* which effectually concealed her identity, few women in England had won a greater fame; for she did not write immoral works, such would not have paid, but she patronized virtue so overwhelmingly that she placed it in a humiliating, not to say degraded, aspect before her readers; while vice, though condemned as unmercifully, came out from her hands stripped of all its revolting associations, and ennobled with a grandeur so fascinating to youth that she was effecting, gradually and unsuspected, a revolution in the opinions of the novel-reading world, male and female. "Zenobia" was the rage, in fact. It was "the thing" to read her works, and therefore young girls read them, and were enlightened on subjects not generally discussed before them by their reticent mothers and aunts. How Zenobia revelled in the idea! Her heroines were gene-

rally fallen angels, who showered blessings around them, even while the good, the true, and the pure recoiled from them, cold, hard, conventional dolls as they were; and unsophisticated youth, after diligently studying Zenobia's works, might be excused if they came to the conclusion that some dereliction from the moral code was an imperative necessity in the formation and perfecting a model saint, which, like the snowdrop, required the chilling frosts and snows of this hard cruel world to develope its perfect bloom.

And then, too, what dreadful women were her duchesses, and countesses, and, indeed, all English matronhood, who fulfilled their mission as respectable wives and mothers. Yes! A sense of secret or detected sin was the condiment without which any life must be flat and dull and uninteresting, and, above all, unattractive to the opposite sex, by her showing. Such were the morals indirectly instilled by Zenobia in her literary character:—as Jane Ash, Mrs. Ash as she was called in private life (though hers was only a brevet rank). She was a woman of middle height, rather stout, and with bold, full blue eyes, a full sensuous mouth and *retroussé* nose; to which we must add a *chevelure* of well-dyed fair

hair, very much befrizzled and dishevelled, and a complexion which bespoke habitual indulgence in the pleasures of the table.

Mrs. Ash had a house in town, where she lived alternately in seclusion, and then in a vortex of society,—the society of a certain set which was fast and Bohemian in its habits, altogether beyond the pale of the recognized respectability of town life, and yet distinct from that still lower grade. Here she received her friends, for the most part fast men and women, her unconscious models; women not always fallen angels, but angels ready to fall on the shortest notice; women of an aspiring turn of mind, anxious to “see life;” horsey, fast girls, the daughters of rich farmers, horse-dealers, and country tradesmen, whom she patronized and made happy, by finishing their social education. Few of these women knew that Mrs. Ash “wrote books,” none knew her *nom de plume*, and no one that she was entirely supported by her pen. Such people do not inquire into the past histories of their friends, and as she did not stand alone in her social aspect among her set, there was a tacit understanding that politeness required that “bygones should always be bygones” with them. No Mr. Ash of the

past was ever, therefore, resuscitated, for the purpose of being identified as Jane's departed spouse; he slept peaceably with the Mrs. Harrises and all other apocryphal heroes and heroines whose existence at any time we may occasionally take the liberty of doubting. The Hon. Janet Ashburnham had long reposed in that Gehenna to which are consigned the names of those who bring a stain on their family escutcheon, if they happen to be women!

On the present occasion Mrs. Ash was on a visit to her younger companion, the heiress of a successful trainer and horse-dealer, who, as her own mistress, kept open house for all the young men to whom she was introduced on the hunting-ground, or with whom she had become acquainted in the way of business in her father's time. Passionately fond of the stable, and all that related to the horse, riding like a jockey since she could sit alone on one, Hannah Martindale knew no higher aspiration than to indulge her taste for equine associations to their full extent. To enjoy her liberty and "see life" was all she required for her present enjoyment. Her ambition, however, pointed to a future in which, as the wife of some fast young man of good family,

she might become permanently established as a "lady." Going to the extreme of fastness, loudness, and horsiness, she "knew," in her own language, "how to take care of herself." There was little chance of Hannah's becoming a fallen angel of the orthodox type; she was only coarse, bold, and free,—utterly without modesty or that warm and loving organization which finds its best apology for error, in the heart. It was this young, almost unsexed woman, to whom Gilbert Pelham offered the brush on its rejection by Ethel.

"Holloa, Pelham! What's up? Won't she have it?" said she.

"No, Miss ——," and Ethel's name stuck as it were in Gilbert's throat, and refused to find utterance in such hearing. "That young lady begs me to offer it to the lady who was first in among the regular field. She was only an accidental spectator, and therefore she thinks it unfair to deprive you of your legitimate prize,—your well-earned laurels."

"More fool she! that's all. However, it's an ill wind as blows no one good luck."

"Who is your young friend?" asked Mrs. Ash, with an eye to a model.

"Only a very young girl,—a sort of connection of mine 'in fact.'"

"She is well mounted ; that chestnut goes like a bird."

"I did not notice;" and Gilbert tried in vain to get away. He did not choose to discuss Ethel with them; he felt humbled and mortified that she should have surprised him in such company, perplexed lest she should ask him about them when they met again, worried that Roger should have seen him with them, for he had met the old man's reproving glance once, and that once was enough for him.

Jane Ash, with the instincts of the past, read all this, and said nothing. How her heart yearned still towards that past!—that past to which Ethel's present might bear some touching resemblance. She was no talker generally; she rode hard and well, but with a grim, silent vigour, very different from the noisy *abandon* of her friend.

Hannah Martindale, on the contrary, never ceased making a noise of some kind. It is not my intention to quote the racy phraseology in which she chaffed Gilbert about his friend, until she drove him almost to despair. She had

"spotted him" some few weeks before as a possible lover, one who might fulfil her requirements when she "settled down," and she was naturally inquisitive about his female friends. Not that she wished to know any of them; she disliked women's society of any rank,—men were her companions and associates. But the difference of his manner, the respectfulness of his address, his whole style during the few moments of their interview, while she sat watching them, was quite enough to convince her that Ethel was a "swell" of some sort, and a possible rival. She gave the young girl one look,—that look which was photographed on Ethel's memory.

Gilbert had come to the meet from Oxford by train; and with the intention of joining them. He, too, "saw life" in Crosby Grange, Hannah's home, and very jolly dinners, though "in the rough," she gave, so he was obliged to return with her; and they were also accompanied by a few other undergraduates, in whose "education" she was assisting, as well as some young squires.

"There goes that silly little muff again with her groom. What a proud, conceited, stuck-up thing!"

"No more of that, Hannah."

"Why not?"

"Because I won't stand it,—that's why."

"Oh, you won't, won't you? That's it, is it? And you won't tell us her name?"

"It does not signify to you what her name is; she lives a very retired life, and you are not likely to meet her again."

"I'm not good enough, I suppose," and rage silenced the girl for a time, during which her eyes flashed fire, her lips pouted, and she lashed her jaded horse to the extremity of its remaining strength. Suddenly she unfastened the brush from where Gilbert had secured it, and flinging it with all her strength across a hedge, exclaimed, "There! I won't have her leavings. I won't take it from the conceited young monkey. If they did not give it to me at first, I'll not have it second-hand."

"Don't make a fool of yourself, Hannah," exclaimed Jane Ash.

"I *will* be a fool, if I like; and who can hinder me? But I won't have her leavings, or any one else's, if I know it."

"You may have to take other people's leavings,—and be glad of them, too,—whether you

know it or not, some day, Hannah,—the world is full of vicissitudes.”

“Not if I know it!—no second-hands for me!”

Gilbert rode on in silence. He let the women have it out together, for he was in no humour for the sort of thing which constituted conversation with either, but the words imprinted themselves on his memory. How often did he recall them in after years,—“I won’t have her leavings!”

CHAPTER XVI.

A SUDDEN PLUNGE.—THE PHOTOGRAPHER
BECOMES A HERO.

ETHEL did not hunt again. Snow and frost set in, which kept her very much within doors, and she was consequently more assiduous in her attentions to her grandmother. In addition to her regular studies, she read the 'Times' every day to the old lady, besides other periodicals,—thus giving her glimpses of the world as it was rolling on, a world which was fast changing its aspect, its fashion of thought and action, and as decidedly as its costumes and amusements, from those in vogue in her day. Ethel enjoyed this duty; she seldom wearied of reading, and, as a part of the insensible education which develops and matures the intellect, it was most valuable.

Gilbert did not make his appearance again for some time, and the incidents of that memorable day were almost forgotten.

But spring came. The tender and varied foliage of the trees shone forth once more in fresh purity of colour. Pale yellow laburnums waved their golden fringes in thick clusters among lilacs of both kinds, backed by copper-beech, the brilliant, graceful larch, the magnificent, fragrant horse-chestnut, and the still ruddy oak,—the sombre pines and the endless piles of other verdant-foliaged forest-trees rising tier above tier, until the summits of the tiny hills were capped and crowned by them. Then they seemed to chase each other down again into the varying undulations, or stood out alone in single solitary relief against a clear blue sky, or cast their shadows across the enamelled lawns.

Once more Lady Agnes was out on Ethel's arm, inhaling the freshness of the season, and seeing with her imagination the paradise around her. They were walking to meet Nellie on her daily visit to the Priory, and instead of Nellie they met Caleb Williams.

He said he was on his way to the Priory to report himself, and to solicit the further indulgence of permission to take some spring effects.

Ethel exclaimed at once, "Oh, Mr. Williams, I am so very much obliged to you for that picture! It is exquisite! I wonder you waste your time on those landscapes, when you might make your fortune by portraits."

"The profession is crowded in town, and the freedom of this nomadic life suits me better. I only take portraits occasionally, to fill up time in which I cannot obtain outdoor effects. I cannot select my sitters as I can my landscapes; and of some faces, one specimen is quite enough, without multiplying copies of it indefinitely."

"When I lost my sight, your art was in its infancy, and I can only remember daguerreotypes on silver, which only looked well in some lights. They tell me now that you excel fine mezzotinto engravings in your sun printing."

"It is the branch of the art most closely approached so far, but every day adds perfection to what is more a science than an art, when one studies it chemically;—then it is deeply interesting; and it goes some way towards realizing one's early ideas of magic, for it is still in some respects a mystery, and suggests at the same time vague notions of solutions to some of the chemical mysteries of nature. In my humble

way it absorbs me, and I puzzle my brain to find reasons for everything."

"And so do I," said Ethel. "I hate mysteries; and only let me get an idea of one, and I am sure I shall always persevere until I sift it to the foundation. I suppose it is what they call 'an inquiring mind.'"

"It is not always a safe frame of mind, though! Some mysteries are better never solved, Miss Chetwynd; some only reveal unavailing anguish and despair, better far concealed for ever."

There was a deep pathos in his voice—so deep, that Lady Agnes, who was walking slowly onward, turned to him suddenly, and murmured, "How strange!" Then, quickly changing, she said—

"In my young days it was the fashion to repress, rather than to stimulate, the spirit of inquiry in young ladies. Our mother, Eve, must have possessed an inquiring mind when she solved the first mystery in Eden, and brought no happiness with it. It used to be called curiosity in my day. Don't you be trying to taste unknown fruit, my child, or some day you may, like her, partake of poison." And she stroked the arm on which she was leaning.

Caleb abruptly turned the conversation into a new channel.

"One part of my petition is still to be made. The rustic bridge across the Monkswater is a most picturesque object in itself, but in one aspect it is particularly so, taking in that bold pile of rock which supports it on the opposite side, and Mrs. Mildmay's cottage beyond. I promised Miss Chetwynd, or rather she promised me, that I should have the pleasure of including her when I take it. May I hope some day, when the shadows are long, and the effect of light and shade best, that she will do me the honour of standing?"

Ethel was eager to accept this offer, and Lady Agnes readily gave her consent, but she thought that Nellie should be introduced too. Nellie used to be very graceful once.

"And oh, Grannie! let us make a group! and do come and be taken with us."

"We shall see when the day comes, Ethel. I wonder what is detaining Nellie."

They had now approached the house by one of the winding paths, so Mr. Williams made his usual obsequious *congé*, and took his departure, while the two ladies wandered among the flower-beds.

"What a very superior person that Mr. Williams seems. His voice has such melody and refinement in its tones, he seems at times to touch some responding chord which vibrates strangely through my whole soul, and—I cannot tell why—I think I must have met him at some period of my life, but I cannot recall when or where,—I suppose it is because the voice is my only means of judging people, and I always did so even when I could see them. But, Ethel, although I say this, dear, you must not forget the difference between your station and his. A true lady can best maintain her own by extreme politeness to every one. Still, you must remember that, however correct and proper and above his position he may be, men in his class are generally not gentlemen. I don't like that free and easy levelling system creeping in among young ladies ; my Ethel must not adopt it."

"Oh, dearest, I remember now what is keeping Nellie. Why of course she is waiting to receive Evelyn ! How stupid of me not to remember !"

And in fact this was the case. Evelyn's aunt was visiting in a neighbouring county, and was therefore graciously pleased to spare Evelyn for a short visit to her mother. There were two

reasons for this unwonted condescension. One was that Evelyn had "a little cold," and being therefore not as equal as usual to all that was expected of her, could best be spared with the hope of recruiting her strength ; another, that she was going where Evelyn might be an encumbrance to her while she was delicate. She had contracted a bad habit of coughing, Mrs. Godfrey Grimstead declared, and to have her barking about her from morning until night was more than she could stand in a strange house ; so Evelyn was to pay a short visit to her mother. Mrs. Grimstead was Mr. Mildmay's sister, who had married a rich City man, and, having no children of her own, had adopted and promised to provide for Evelyn. Mrs. Grimstead was a lady of the species immortalized by Dickens in his heroine Mrs. Chick. She, too, was an energetic woman, and as firmly believed that even our grim master, Death, could be conquered or dismissed by "resolution."

She had a very poor opinion indeed of the fine lady her brother had chosen to marry ; "a poor creature" she had called Nellie, and it had been with the purest motives and from the highest sense of duty that she had asked for the babe, to rescue her from her mother's mismanagement,

and, as she said, "to make a woman of her." With a handsome jointure, a good house, and no children, she was able to concentrate her attention upon carrying out her plans for Evelyn's welfare.

The child was very lovely, but with the loveliness born of decay; with those brilliant eyes, that clear skin and hectic flush in which consumption decks her victims. The symptoms had been present from her earliest youth, but the good lady refused to see or recognize them. Energy would conquer even incipient consumption where it did exist, and she was quite sure it did not; the girl had always been like that, lazy and indolent like her mother. It was her duty to make her energetic, to make her work hard at her studies and get out of those languid, idle ways. And she should be made hardy, too,—take her cold bath summer and winter, cold or no cold,—nothing like a cold bath in the morning. So, although Evelyn had had "a little cold" all the winter, and had contracted that bad habit of "coughing and barking for ever," the girl had never relaxed from her prescribed regimen. There might have been some incipient misgivings dawning on the good lady when she gave Evelyn

permission to visit her mother, but she gave no sign of them. She had told the doctor her opinion, and, as that functionary was her most obsequious slave, he dared not risk the loss of her patronage by venturing to differ from her. "A little change of air," he said, would set her up no doubt, and especially if her studies were relaxed. This time Evy was glad to come home; even to exchange Mrs. Grimstead's luxurious home, her carriages, and her company, for her mother's quiet cottage. So she left all her languor at Cheltenham, and came with wild gushing spirits to enjoy her liberty in the country,—to bask in the sunshine one minute, and to romp with Ethel the next, until her heart beat and her breath became short, and she was forced to rest, before the tardy colour was heightened in Ethel's cheeks by the effect of her exertions. Then Ethel would call her "a poor weak little pet," and Evy would retort and call Ethel a "great strong thing" (as if either was responsible for their physical powers or the want of them); and then each felt the intense pleasure girls only can feel when they meet with a congenial companion of their own age after living much alone with elderly people.

Since the day of her arrival, a week had elapsed, and Ethel had been quite carried out of her usual routine by her companion. Both girls seemed to have given themselves up to the indulgence of the wildest spirits. Evelyn's was the result of a feverish, excited temperament, and Ethel's had their origin very much in the sympathy she felt for her young cousin, and the infection of her gaiety. Ellen often looked uneasily at her child, but even she was carried away, and half blinded by her gaiety at times, while at others a pang of anxiety at her danger would strike her with dread; she shuddered at the loveliness others turned to gaze at. She upbraided herself for her weakness in giving up her child. Why could she not have educated her as she was educating Ethel, and have watched over her health? She buried her fears, however, lest they might cast a damp over her visit, and except from her administering cod-liver oil, and plying her with the daily luxuries plentifully supplied from the Priory, no one knew that Nellie was steeling her heart for the hour of trial which she foresaw approaching; even Nellie, however, little guessed how soon.

A week after Evelyn had been at home, a

joyous party had assembled on the bridge to assist in the tableau which Caleb was bent upon producing. The two ladies from the Cottage had walked through the grounds to meet Lady Agnes and Ethel, and had returned with them to the bridge before Caleb appeared on the scene with his paraphernalia; he began at once to discuss the proposed picture, taking a furtive glance at the little beauty now and then. The point at first selected was, from the change of season, no longer the best; the sun came from a different direction, and the old shadows were now lights, and the lights shadows. Alone, Ethel would have been quiet and tractable, but Caleb's patience was sorely tried by the mirth of the two girls, who stimulated each other's merriment, and as he justly imagined, at his expense, as far as Evy was concerned.

There was a picturesque pile of rock on the side of the stream next to Mrs. Mildmay's cottage which peeped through the trees on the rising ground behind it. From that pile to a corresponding but artificial one on the Priory bank, the bridge was thrown in one complex arch of woodwork, which would come out beautifully in a photograph, all agreed to think.

Upon the Priory side, then, he fixed his camera, and then went over to arrange his figures on the rocks, which afforded several effective standing and sitting places in their bold irregularity, before they suddenly sank in a precipice over a deep pool in the river.

Ethel was like a fawn, and could skip from rock to rock with unerring step. Evy was less elastic, but ambitious to do as well, and Ellen was in a state of nervous terror for both, while Lady Agnes, who could see nothing, was placed where she could hear all, and her wheel-chair at the same time could be used as an object, but she got up, and leant over the bridge to hear better, and the artist rushed excitedly over to entreat her to remain in the same position.

It was a first rate bit of grouping; months of study could not have produced anything better, if they would only all keep still.

The poor photographer rushed across the bridge again to his camera, imploring them not to move, shouting across the river that he would be as quick as he could, and not keep them long.

"I say, Ethel, did you ever see such a Caliban? Mamma dearest, where did that

creature come from ? Did Caliban have one eye or two ? I think I will call him Cyclops."

"One moment, ladies, you are charming!"

"More than you are, beauty!"

"Evy dearest, you are unkind,—be quiet for a moment."

"If she says a word more about my friend, I will topple her over into the river; that is, I *would*, only for you, Nellie," said Ethel.

"Children, children, what are you saying? I hear you," came over the bridge from Lady Agnes.

"Oh, we'll be good now. I say, Ethel, let's have some science. I am so tired of this. Look up under the bridge, Ethel, at that beautiful fern. I do believe it is quite a new one; I never saw one like it. If Caliban were worth anything I would make him get it."

"Evy dearest, do be quiet."

"I assure you I am only doing natural science, and a very fashionable branch of it,—fernomania; I have a mania for ferns, so by hook or by crook I intend to get that one. You are such old world people here, that, living among the rarest specimens, you do not know one from another. Oh, dear, when will he be done!"

"If you will promise to speak civilly of my friend, I will get you the ferns somehow; only don't speak loud, or you'll frighten Grannie, and she will forbid it."

"What are you two plotting about?" asked Nellie from her perch, where she was supposed to be looking for some undiscoverable object, perhaps for the rock to open and a frog to emerge, as Evy said.

"Trying to say 'minimi pinimi plum' to each other, in token of doing our best to behave pretty," said Evy. "You won't get into all our secrets, dearest. You have made Ethel too humdrum and quiet, and I must rattle a little life into her," and Evy rattled a little cough that made her mother sigh and turn towards her.

"Well, if that is not too good! Our handsome friend has finished, and is admiring his work, and has never told us."

"May we move yet?" asked Ellen across the stream.

"Dear me, I beg you ten thousand pardons, ladies. I was comparing my negative, and quite forgot to release you. It is perfect."

Every one was glad to move, and Mrs. Mildmay at once scrambled up to join Lady Agnes.

"How do you mean to reach it?" whispered Evelyn.

Now Ethel had, as we know, long limbs, and knew how to use them, even if ungracefully, and she felt certain that, if no one interrupted her, she could obtain the coveted plants by climbing up the woodwork of the bridge, and reaching them with her long arms, and then throwing them to Evy as she secured them. Evy had awakened the slumbering spirit of enterprise in her nature, which had lain dormant so long. She would gratify Evy and win the sort of spurious laurel a girl of fifteen values sometimes for undertaking very odd enterprises simply because they are odd.

Caleb was too much engrossed in his work to watch them. The two elder ladies were above them. Ethel would do it in a minute, before any one saw them. Quick as thought, she was ascending through the woodwork. There was not a single horizontal in the whole edifice; a few uprights and a series of beams, fitting into each other obliquely, formed groins and arches, one above the other, giving mutual support. As a whole, it was considered a marvel of rustic ingenuity, a credit to the humble architect who

planned it; and Monkswater would exult when the finished picture could be proudly displayed on their walls, with the much-respected lady of the soil included. So thought Caleb at least.

Ethel succeeded triumphantly at first. She was clear now of the intricacies, and suspended over the river, which, as I have said, was very deep at this confined spot; but her head was strong, and she only saw her ferns. Still, she was anxious to accomplish her feat, and reach all the splendid plants she saw higher up, before she was seen, and called down.

"Here is one," she whispered, "catch it quick. I see such a beauty as the bencher."

And the "step" was taken, and then

Just then came "Ethel, heads up, now that

"Oh, bother," said Ethel, "Our We are coming, dearest," to her admiring his work

"Ethel dearest, do quick; come and see the negative with us."

"But where can they be?" said Nellie.

This Ethel heard spoken immediately over her head, where her elders were now standing. Now Ethel was not nervous, but she never dreamt of offending her grandmother, and on this occasion she knew the old lady would be displeased.

"Oh, if I could only get down before they begin to scold me! as I know I deserve to be scolded; but as I am here, I should so like to get that fern." So thought Ethel.

"Where can those children be?" came close over her head again, for Evelyn was immediately under the side of the bridge, and could not be seen from above.

"One more step, Evy. Watch and catch."

The woodwork was green and slippery, but Ethel was sure-footed, and her long taper fingers held on securely wherever she could get anything to hold. Was it then? a loose nail, a rotten timber? Lady's, why need we ask? One loud the Cottage and sh--k, one loud crash of break-every other, one m--plunge, and Evelyn stood alone; and-- The tw-- after shriek rent the air, and w-- Ethel would d--er that bridge, when the poor child realized w-- had taken place, and then, in a second or two, all knew that Ethel was in the river.

Thomas, the footman, was their first hope; but he could not swim; Caleb was forgotten, when a second plunge was heard from his side as he jumped into the water. The stream was swift; and in a few hundred yards the rocks

again closed in, and formed rapids at a bend of the channel, out of sight of the bridge. These, he knew, must arrest her progress, so he went down stream at once to cut her off, and meet her. Oh, the intense agony of that moment to the three helpless watchers, one of whom could only watch with her ear!

In a minute or two something was seen to rise—a piece of broken timber—and something else with it, floating rapidly down, and away from them. Could that be Ethel? Could she be still clinging to it? They could not tell at the distance, and amid the white foam it had produced; but as it floated round the bend they saw Caleb boldly striking out for it, and then all was out of sight to them! He saw that whether it was the clutch of death or despair, that she held tightly on; her long hair floated back, and her mouth was near the surface, near enough to breathe if she retained consciousness; it nerved his arm.

A few moments, and then a strong hand grasped her, just as she was losing consciousness—just as her strength was yielding, and her hold relaxing, and she felt she was going down; and just before they reached the shallow ford of rocks at which the

rapids began, and upon which she must have been terribly bruised ; but she had been carried round the bold headland which formed the bend, and both were out of sight of the bridge before Caleb reached her, and she was rescued. Now fainting and insensible, but still *alive*.

It was hard for Nellie to stand an idle spectator of such a scene. No word had passed the lips of that aged woman, but they moved silently ; and deep and fervent were the prayers offered up while the watchers told her what they saw. At length Ellen could bear it no longer, so she said,

“Dear Lady Agnes, let Evelyn go with you to the Cottage, and order hot water, blankets, and every other necessary. Let me run down to the bank to be ready to help if I am wanted. Thomas has gone to see what he can do. I shall be back soon, and, in the meantime, pray ; your prayers will be heard, *He* will help us !”

Evelyn would have accompanied her mother if possible, but she saw it was out of the question, and she was too much sobered and humbled to be otherwise than mutely obedient now. Meanwhile, Ellen was not long in reaching a little landing-place at the ford, the only spot at which

Caleb could hope to land with his burden, and there she met him with the insensible form of Ethel clasped in his arms.

"Thank God she is alive! We shall save her!" and he strode up the steep bank towards the Cottage, while Thomas was disporting his calves on the opposite side in useless bewilderment.

"Let me help you."

"No, no! I don't feel her weight, and the sooner we have her in the house the better."

The man seemed gifted with supernatural strength, and sensible of only the one absorbing interest;—heat or cold were both alike unheeded by himself or his insensible charge.

Few words were exchanged between Ellen and this strange man; but she looked at his face, now tender as a woman's, as he gazed on Ethel's lifeless face, and a sigh escaped her. Why—perhaps he knew; but it was no time for talking. She felt, however, that her silent sympathy was appreciated by that "useless wreck," as this man sometimes had called himself. Henceforth he would know that his Master had still some use for him here below. His shade had floated away, his hat was gone, but he heeded not.

"Caleb, let me tie this handkerchief over your eye."

Even this had escaped his notice. She twisted her necktie round his brow as he hurried on. Her presence of mind seldom left her when thinking of others; and now she knew that there were interests at stake which even Ethel's danger could not supersede. Then she hastened home with her ray of hope, to cheer those still in suspense; Evelyn was watching for her, and read good news in her face before she spoke.

Caleb bore his insensible burden straight up to the room hastily prepared for her, and where a fire, though just lighted, was beginning to burn brightly, for wood was heaped almost up the chimney, and hot blankets were ready. He laid her tenderly down, and then he felt he must go. He knew she would live with God's help, but he could not stay to see her first smile. He must leave her to Ellen and her servant, and to the doctor who came rushing in, and to two or three more, including Mrs. Grymes, who came also to help the little household, or to be in their way. Some one stopped him in the hall with a glass of hot brandy-and-water, and this he drank mechanically. Then, dripping as he was, he hurried

off to his lodgings to get off his wet clothes, and, as his landlady said, to go to his bed. His door was locked at all events, and orders given, that except to tell him of the young lady, or some message from the Cottage, he was not to be disturbed.

Whatever might have been the meditations of this odd blighted being, no one knew; and, I might almost aver, few cared. There he remained all the rest of that day; late in the evening he was heard to go out for a short time and then return; but the next morning "he was just as if nothing had happened out of the common, and, if you'd believe me, not a word would he say one way or the other, 'cep as we'd heard it all afore, and there wor no mortal use in telling of it agin."

His very reticence, however, helped to add a mysterious interest to the deed he had done. He was a village hero for the moment, and although he would have drawn a full bar if he could have been secured at the 'Mitre,' and induced to relate how it came about and how he did it, as he was not to be had, the village met and talked for and of him, in his absence; coming to the unanimous conclusion that he had more pluck

in him nor people thought on, and that, of course, my lady would give him a farm rent-free, or may be a thousand; and then Ethel's life had a disputed market-value reduced to the standard of the current coin of the realm,—some setting it down as worth one sum and some another.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DAY AFTER.

THE party assembled round the insensible form of the half-drowned girl, would have afforded another study for Caleb's art, had he been present, or in a fit state of mind to appreciate it.

There was the tall, stately, blind grandmother, helpless from her infirmity, yet anxiously straining her remaining senses to discover the first dawn of returning consciousness. There was the secret instigator of the catastrophe—Evelyn, white as marble, trying to be of use, and dazed, distracted, and only in the way. There was Dr. Everard White, giving his orders with the calm decision of manner, and the resolute air of a man who knew what he was about, and had hope to cheer him on, if he was obeyed. There was

Nellie doing all, feeling all, alone knowing all, silent, calm, judicious,—her tender gentle face full of sympathy, while tears chased each other unheeded down her cheeks, as she performed each needful office for the patient.

At length "the heart was acting," then she breathed, at first faintly and irregularly, then naturally. She had been placed in warm blankets, and every remedy usual in such cases applied, and when she could be left quiet, the poor old lady had seated herself at the side of the bed, and had taken the passive hand, under the covering, in hers, so that she might *feel* her first voluntary movement with returning consciousness. She felt the life in that hand, and was comforted as no assurances could comfort her, until she heard the much loved voice again.

The first moment Nellie could leave the room, she went in search of the photographer; somehow she had taken it for granted he would have remained below, and was disappointed at first to find he had gone home at once.

"Poor Caleb!" mused she; "what can I do for you? What will this lead to?"

On her return, Ethel's eyes were opening, and she smiled a welcome to her friend.

"I am back among you all, Nellie, and I thought I was dead! I just remember, now, how he caught me as I was going down, and now I am here, and dear Grannie's hand the first thing I felt when I awoke,—and somehow I wondered why it was not wet and like timber!"

"We will all go away if you talk; drink this and go to sleep."

Tears were coursing each other down the furrows in the grandmother's cheeks; her lips were moving, as was her usual habit, but except the nervous twitching of her fingers as she held Ethel's within hers, there was no other visible sign of her deep emotion. At length she said—

"Nellie, tell him how we all shall thank and bless him as long as we live, for saving my child! Tell him all I ever can do for him never will be enough to express my gratitude and hers."

And Nellie wrote a few formal conventional phrases to that effect, to thank the artist for saving a life! True, she tried to make her expressions as earnest and heartfelt as she could, but after all, how cold and poor it seemed! She told him Miss Chetwynd was out of danger, and that they hoped in person to express their feel-

ings more fully. And this note he opened his door to receive.

That night accordingly he called to make polite inquiries about the progress of the young lady, as a matter of duty.

Evelyn, worn out with excitement, had gone to bed. Lady Agnes had returned to the Priory under her maid's care, and Ethel now in a profound sleep would probably be able to return home in the morning as well as ever. Ellen therefore was enabled to receive her visitor alone; enabled to administer those words of gentle sympathy which were unconsciously changing the current of his mind—enabling him to bear whatever secret burden he had to bend under, with patience and hope. Hope in that future which knows no change or sorrow or suffering—a future which it rests in our own power to make, with His help, a triumph in proportion as our humiliations here have been great. The truth is, there were ties between them, based on their past histories, which it did not seem expedient to either to have discussed in Woodlandshire. He had known her husband in the few years of their happy married life, and now circumstances made her the one friend in his own reverses—the

one link between his past and present life, between which was an impassable gulf.

Besides the congregation of villagers who had sat upon him and discussed his merits at the 'Mitre,' a more select few of his humble friends assembled for the same purpose in his landlord's parlour.

The worldly wise, among whom were this worthy man and his wife, had already come to the conclusion that it was the best stroke of luck which could have happened to him.

"My lady would give the heart out of her body to any one as done a good turn to Miss Ethel."

"He may take his pick and choice of all the farms on the property for next to nought, if he knowd the use of a spade or a plew, which he don't."

"Don't 'e be too sure o' that! He can talk knowledgable enough 'bout crops and the like when he pleases."

"Them picture-makers never knows nothink o' that sort, and most like my lady will give him five hunder to set him up, and keep him from tramping the country with his box. Better nor a farm he can't work."

And if money could have repaid such a service, it would have been gladly given, but Lady Agnes had much innate delicacy, and this told her that such an offer would wound rather than gratify. On Ethel's return home she made her write a nice, properly expressed letter, which, if formal and too plainly recognizing their respective positions, spoke at the same time of gratitude from the heart, which left that conventional clothing little more than a hollow pretence. It was in fact dictated by Lady Agnes, and in the phraseology of her day, and it did not suit Ethel. Was it wrong? Instinct told her something more was necessary from her, the representative of a more plain-spoken, if not of a more sincere generation; so, after reading it aloud, before sealing it, she added a postscript:—

"I never can forget as long as I live that I owe you my life !

"ETHEL CHETWYND."

It was a wonderful exercise of her individuality, and, although her heart told her she was right, yet those few words cost Ethel much anxious thought and self-examination, and that tender gift of our higher nature, conscience, suffered much thereby.

It is hard, and yet inevitable, that this, our most precious possession, should be so constantly tried by a false standard. How often in its struggles to assert the right, to claim a certain freedom, it is crushed and bruised and warped and deformed, and perhaps finally annihilated !

Ethel felt that her accident had been a punishment, not for disobedience—she had never been told not to do what it never would have occurred to any one to forbid, but for doing what at the time she knew her grandmother would have opposed ; yet, with the secret gratitude for not being scolded still warm in her heart, she had again been guilty of an underhand act. Was she very wicked ? Would she be punished for it ? Should she confess ? Yet Ethel's instinct again told her that there was something in the gratitude she felt for *her life*, which no one could share ; she felt that to read those last lines to a third person, even her grandmother, would destroy their force. When the world has seared and blunted us—when we do daily many daring things with a brave unconsciousness habit has made easy—we look back with wonder at our early youth, and smile at our self-torturings, at the overwhelming importance of some trifles,

mountains to us in those our sensitive days. What has it not cost us afterwards, if on retrospection our words did not seem quite what they should have been? if one was omitted or mispronounced, or if we imagined our perhaps unheeding audience attached more or less significance to them than we intended! What sleepless nights! what hours of musings!

It was a new sensation to Ethel, that of owing her life to a fellow-creature. To look on such and say, "Had not God guided those hands and inspired that head, I should have been at this moment in eternity! These limbs I am now moving by my own volition would be now mouldering in the grave." She longed to see him, to tell him with her own lips a little of what she felt, but he came not. A letter, however, did come, respectful, making light of the "trifling service," but regretting his unavoidable absence for the present. Caleb shrank from the gratitude he knew would overwhelm him.

The day after the accident, Caleb went to look for his forgotten camera and the negative with which would now be associated a deeper interest than any picture itself could ever claim without them; and then he went down under

the bridge to see how it all could have happened.

There lay the tell-tale ferns, all withered and scattered about, and far above him, from the intricate framework, a whole compartment was missing. The nails, rusted with damp, had given way under her weight, and she had gone into the water, firmly holding on—a grasp her instinct had made her retain, and thus her fall had been broken, and her life perhaps saved.

Out among the woods of the Priory Caleb spent his day. There were times when he shunned his species, when he dared not meet the inquiring eye of his fellow-man. The one whom he could have met and conversed with was, he knew, inaccessible; so alone with his God, in His glorious temple under the sky, this strange, wayward being poured out his thanksgiving for being permitted to live through yesterday; permitted to do something, if ever so little, to expiate the sin of his life—the sin under the yoke of which he felt he must die. “God has been good and gracious to me, and sent me His comforter;” and when he went to his solitary room that night, there was a changed spirit in the man. He was taking in Nellie’s teachings, and more of

faith, and hope, and trust. Perhaps a little worldly thankfulness mingled with his purer feelings when he recognized the new advantages of his position—the ostensible link which in future he foresaw must bind him more closely to the stately old lady and the child in whose life he had yet another mysterious interest, the responsibility of which was too much for him.

“Yes, they will think it their duty to accord to me now more notice than the best travelling artist could possibly claim at the hands of that queenly old dame. Gratitude must break down the barriers which conventional manners require between our different stations in life! Yet is this safe, is there no danger in this? God help me! I am beset with dangers, actual, tangible, real, as well as the dangers of my own infirmity of character.”

“Men talk of ‘great’ crimes and great characters—great for their vices as well as their virtues! The tragedies, the mysteries, the revolutions of this world chiefly arise from, and are worked out by human weakness! Weakness and folly, and blindness and perversity! These are the elements out of which they are produced. The worst man ever born never devised half the

evil which a rash or a weak man has sometimes accomplished by *chance*. Chance! What is chance? Is it not in my case God's punishment for my past sins? Yet why should the innocent suffer? Why should I, the weakest of God's creatures, hold the power I do hold over two of his purest and best? Are not the sins of the fathers visited on the children? Father and mother both erred, and you must suffer, poor child! poor child! Yet, 'Mercies unto thousands of them that serve me!' O Lord! let then the virtues of that noble lady, let her meek service to thee shed its power and influence over that child, and save her—save her from the effects of her parents' sins—save her from the consequences of any folly or indiscretion I may be tempted to commit."

Was Caleb Williams mad?

With all his gratitude and thankfulness for being permitted to render this service, there seemed to be some hidden motive which made him shrink from encountering the thanks which they would have showered on him—shrink from the artificial *rôle* he felt he should be called upon to enact in a first meeting with the ladies; so once more he took his departure from the village

with a precipitation which seemed part of his moody fitful nature. Even Nellie did not know of his intention until a few blotted words told her he was gone ; a sad change had swept over that little household before he crossed its threshold again.

CHAPTER XVIII.

GONE OUT FROM AMONG US.

CALEB, Ethel, all the events of the preceding day, were destined to fade from the memory of Ellen Mildmay for some time to come. As I already told you, Ethel was able to rise the morning after her "ducking," as she called it, and to walk home to her grandmother. She felt "queer," she owned to herself, and walking was something different to what it had been the day before ; but she was too anxious to seem quite well, and to make light of the accident, to say this. So she dressed herself, and then went down to a very late breakfast.

"Where's Evy?" And Ethel thought of their joint escapade.

"Evy is not well this morning. I think it is the reaction after the excitement yesterday; so I would not let her get up. Ethel, if it had been Evelyn instead of you yesterday, she never would have recovered. Thank God for your strong constitution."

Ethel looked inquiringly at Ellen, and then, for the first time, it gleamed on her that Ellen was anxious, and dreaded something beyond the "little cough" which had excited her aunt's vexation.

Ethel was soon in her friend's room; it was their first moment alone together since their escapade. Evelyn was lying with her eyes closed when she went in, a round red spot on each cheek, and yet with that worn look which harmonizes so ill with a bright colour. She sat up at once, and threw her arms round Ethel, who sat on the side of her bed and embraced her tenderly.

"Oh, Ethel! don't tell Lady Agnes that I tempted you. I could not sleep all night for thinking of what would follow her knowing that it was all my fault, although you are all right again." And Evy stopped to cough.

"Of course I shall not, for I was as much to

blame, or more, than you were. I went, like a goose, to show off before you, and a pretty show I made of it. Oh, you foolish child! to go and cry and make yourself ill, while I was sleeping like a top; and now just look how flushed and feverish you have made yourself."

"Oh, Ethel! what can I do to show you how sorry I am?"

"Nothing, but get well, and come and have a walk. But stay, there is one thing. Promise me never to say any more of those unkind things about Mr. Williams. You know he has saved my life; nothing would have saved me from drowning, if he had not been quick. Oh, Evy! it seemed as if I had been hours in the water; and every wrong thing I ever did, or could remember, came all before me at once. I saw him coming, and it gave me courage to keep up; and then it seemed as if he never would reach me in time; and then I believed I was dead—I did, indeed. And when I came to life again in the spare room, and I felt Grannie's hand, I was sure at first I was in another world. It was something so strange—so really like dying; and little things, which seemed nothing when I did them, and things I had neglected to do, all seemed so

dreadful to me, as I went floating down with that piece of slimy timber in my hands, and the water in my ears, in my eyes, and in my mouth when I tried to scream."

"And I did it all," persisted Evy. And then she rambled on, stopping to cough every moment.

"I must go to Grannie now, or she will be sending the carriage for me, or perhaps coming for me herself; and you must be quiet, and I see I am doing you harm by staying here and letting you talk;" and Ethel stooped and kissed her young cousin. But Evy could not lie still, she said. There was pain and uneasiness here, and a queer feeling there, and she could not help coughing take what she would; she knew it was a bad habit she could not help, and it made her head ache. She was feverish, restless, excited. A horror possessed her lest Lady Agnes should prevent Ethel's being much with her, and that somehow it would all injure her mother. Evy felt some remorse for the indifference which she had once entertained for that mother, fostered by the jealous temper of her injudicious aunt, but she still held Lady Agnes in great awe, for Mrs. Grimstead was a vulgar-minded woman, and

always sneered at titles—because, perhaps, she did not claim one. However unfounded, Evy could not get rid of this feeling towards the grand old lady her mother's truest friend, that she was "proud and haughty."

Ellen felt that she must go with Ethel, and deliver her up safe to her grandmother, and Evy knew she was gone, having promised to sleep in her absence, but instead of this, she took it into her head that after the fashion of "rows" she had seen elsewhere, there would be recriminations and upbraidings when they reached the Priory, and this idea gained ground when her mother's stay seemed protracted beyond what her impatience seemed to tell her was a reasonable time. Fit after fit of coughing succeeded each other, and then the little maid below hoped she had dropped asleep, at last, as she suddenly ceased to cough, and when her mistress came in, the girl cautioned her not to disturb Miss Mildmay.

"She's been coughing awful bad, most ever since you went out." Nevertheless Nellie's heart forced her into her child's room, and there, with her pillow saturated with blood, and her face the hue of death, Evelyn lay insensible!

Dr. Everard White was soon at her bedside, but his face, inscrutable as he always imagined it to be, bore a very different expression to the one it displayed the day before. He saw at once that one of the chief vessels of the lungs was ruptured, and that her days might be numbered by a single figure.

That evening, while our friend Caleb, all unconscious of this additional, and much greater calamity to his friends, was seated in the train, flying from his "stroke of luck," the good doctor was breaking the sad news at the Priory, and enlisting the sympathies of its inmates for the sorrowing mother.

Evy did not linger long. She could not speak much, but she begged Ethel to be a daughter to her mother, to supply the place she ought to have filled and did not—to comfort her when she was gone; and Nellie needed comfort, for when too late she upbraided herself for giving up her child to any one for the prospect of worldly advantage. She did not like to blame Mrs. Grimstead even to herself, yet she could not help feeling that if she had kept her child under her own eye, that she might perhaps have been saved! And then that lady came, and was less

delicate towards the, in her opinion, delinquent mother. She lamented that she had ever been so foolish as to trust her darling out of her sight; she might have foreseen the consequences, she said; and as she rustled her stiff silk about the little parlour, she jerked out her insinuations without mercy. With the tears streaming down her round, well-fed cheeks, she came to a climax with:

"I have spent a little fortune on her!—spared no money on her!—and after all, this is my return! The world is a wicked, ungrateful world!" But whether Mrs. Grimstead's reflections tended to affix the brand of ingratitude on the dying girl, the mother, or the rest of the world in general, did not seem clear to herself. One thing was certain, she was angry with the world in general, and Ellen in particular, because her adopted child was snatched from her just as that world's admiration of her beauty and accomplishments was to repay her for the money she had spent on her. One pang never disturbed her self-satisfaction, nor did she ever remember indeed how she had dictated *her* opinions to her too complaisant physician. The girl never had any energy; she never would exert herself;

she was just like her mother. This was by no means a consolatory visitor, in a house awaiting the entry of the angel of death. But the Vicar came and offered his consolations to the pair so soon to be separated, and then Mrs. Grymes and the aunt fraternized below.

A few days after, the good man uttered those last words, and performed that last ceremony which separates us from the corporeal presence of our loved ones for ever. And Evelyn slept in the vault of the Chetwynds, which for centuries had held the ashes of some of the family, though disused by later generations, and this "piece of pride" received its due share of obloquy from the irate and rather plebeian aunt.

Nellie bore her grief as she had borne many preceding ones—like a Christian—though embittered by self-reproach, and the vulgar reflections of her sister-in-law. "How could I leave my child, my only one, with that coarse-minded woman? Money, love of money for her. I *sold* her, and now she is gone from me for ever!"

As her grief calmed down, Ethel, that mysterious orphan waif, crept into the vacant space her child had always filled, whether present or absent from her, and the pledge given on that

child's deathbed both studied to fulfil. Henceforth Nellie was to be Ethel's adopted mother, and the refining influence of this, the young girl's first sorrow, and the development which this new tie to her old friend produced in her character, was remarkable and beneficial in the highest degree. She seemed at once to burst forth into a new phase of existence, not quite womanhood, but with the tender foreshadowings which precede it, after our link with childhood has been suddenly snapped by some crisis in our lives. Ethel had tasted what death might be, even with her puerile errors; what must be the thought to those burdened with great sin, or some secret crime unatoned for, unforgiven!

The first intimation which Caleb received of Evelyn's death was in a piece of the 'Times' picked up in a Highland inn, where it had been left by his predecessor.

It was a month after the funeral!

END OF VOL. I.

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